

THE LOST GIRLS

DEMETER-PERSEPHONE
AND THE LITERARY
IMAGINATION,
1850-1930

Andrew Radford



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Studies in Comparative Literature 53

ERRATA

- p. 37; footnote 70: Quotation from Ian Morris, *Classical Greece*, pp. 27-30.
- pp. 42-43; footnote 96: Quotation from Shawn Malley, 'Disturbing Hellenism: Walter Pater, Charles Newton, and the Myth of Demeter and Persephone.' In *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*. Eds. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2002), p. 105.
- p. 71; footnote 69: See Linda K. Hughes, *The Many-Faced Glass: Tennyson's Dramatic Monologues* (Athen, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1987), pp. 238-40.
- p. 76; footnote 79: See Hughes, *The Many-Faced Glass*, pp. 239-42.
- p. 178: Richard [Jefferies]
- p. 198; footnote 70: See Lois Cucullu, 'Shepherds in the Parlour: Forster's apostles, pagans, and native sons', *Novel*, 32 (1998), 19-47.
- p. 284; footnote 41: See Jane Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, p. 214.
- p. 289; footnote 57: See Patrick Wright, 'Coming Back to the Shores of Albion', 'Coming Back to the Shores of Albion: The Secret England of Mary Butts (1890-1937)', in *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 107.
- p. 314; footnote 141: See Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, p. 215.

TEXTXET

Studies in Comparative Literature 53

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The Lost Girls

Demeter-Persephone and the Literary Imagination, 1850-1930

Andrew Radford



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The jacket/cover image, 'Marble Statue of Demeter' (Greek, carved around 350BC, from Knidos in southwest Asia Minor) is courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Introduction

How are we to get back [...] Demeter, Persephone, and the halls of Dis? [...] We've got to get them back, for they are the world our soul, our greater consciousness, lives in.¹

D. H. Lawrence's impatient plea supplies a critical lens through which to inspect a number of British writers between 1850 and 1930 for whom the myth of Demeter's loss and eventual recovery of her cherished daughter Kore-Persephone, swept off in violent and catastrophic captivity by Dis, God of the Dead, had both huge personal and aesthetic significance. Lawrence relished and contributed to the tangle of ancient origins, narrative applications and scholarly conjecture that has shaped the myth. Voluminous research already documents how Demeter-Persephone imbues William Carlos Williams's *Kora in Hell* and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*.² The myth is also deployed to mark phases and transitions in the female life cycle in individual poems by H.D., Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath and Margaret Atwood.³ Yet relatively few commentators have addressed in any sustained way to what extent the myth impinged upon British literature of this period, or whether an artistic cult of Demeter and Persephone emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, which modernist fiction inherited, revised, and amplified.

This book, in addition to scrutinising canonical and less well-known texts by male authors such as Thomas Hardy, E. M. Forster and D. H. Lawrence,

¹ D. H. Lawrence, 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. and intro. by Edward D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936), p. 357. Lawrence's invocation is reminiscent of Miranda (a portrait of the poet H.D.) in *Miranda Masters*, a fictional account of John Cournos's early career in England: "'I want to see the old gods back!'" said Miranda in nervous, quavering tones, as if it were a personal matter, a matter of life and death. "They are not dead. They are but in hiding, waiting to emerge when their time comes!'" See Cournos, *Miranda Masters* (New York: Knopf, 1926), p. 6.

² Lilian Feder discusses Pound's use of the Demeter-Persephone myth with further bibliography. See *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); also Guy Davenport, *The Geography of the Imagination: Forty Essays by Guy Davenport* (New York, 1981), pp. 141-64.

³ For references to Demeter and Persephone in H.D.'s longer poems, such as *Helen in Egypt* and *Trilogy*, see Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H. D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981). In Robert Lowell's 'The Mills of the Kavanaughs', the protagonist Anne Kavanaugh, the widowed inheritor of the estate, thinks of herself as Persephone, 'the goddess'. See *The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (New York: Harcourt, 1951), pp. 2-3. In Sylvia Plath's 'Two Sisters of Persephone', the two Persephones in the worlds above and below become alternative and constricting destinies for woman: the spinster office worker computes in the dark 'problems on / A mathematical machine', while her sister 'sun bride' grows 'quick with seed' and 'bears a king'. See *The Collected Poems: Sylvia Plath*, ed. by Ted Hughes (New York: Harper, 1981), pp. 31-32.

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also focuses on unjustly neglected women writers – Mary Webb and Mary Butts – who utilised occult tropes to relocate themselves culturally, and to restore a forgotten legacy, the myth of matriarchal origins. These novelists are placed in relation not only to one another but also to Victorian archaeologists and especially to Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928), one of the first women to distinguish herself in the history of British Classical scholarship and whose anthropological approach to the study of early Greek art and religion both influenced – and became transformed by – the literature. In Harrison’s writings the Hellenic past seemed an ever-accessible present ready to serve very contemporary personal and cultural imperatives. Harrison’s theories about concrete language creating vivid ideas rather than exemplifying preconceived ones; her stress on the importance of desire as a motivating force behind art, marking a decisive shift from personal to collective emotion; her eloquent insistence on the need for the crusading modern artist, like an ancient ritualist, to circumvent or transmute private personality by identifying not only with a group but with the environment, affect nearly all the novelists included here.

While Webb and Butts have been largely overlooked by recent academic criticism, their wider fates could not have been more dissimilar. Webb’s fiction was ridiculed by the London cognoscenti, and parodied by Stella Gibbons in *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932). But in April 1928 Stanley Baldwin, then Prime Minister, spoke at a dinner of the Royal Literary Fund, mentioning Webb in glowing terms and chiding the press for the undeserved oblivion into which she had fallen. Baldwin was a cousin of Rudyard Kipling and a man with some literary pretensions of his own, so his remarks were heeded, and a Mary Webb revival began.⁴ Her novel *Gone to Earth* (1917) – selected by Rebecca West as ‘Novel of the Year’ – was filmed in 1950 by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, and much of her fiction remained in print for years before Virago initiated a more methodical policy of reprints in the 1970s. The BBC even produced an adaptation of *Precious Bane* in the

⁴ In his regular book page for the *London Evening Standard* of 3 May 1928, Arnold Bennett wrote that the ‘resuscitation of books out of a state of suspended vitality is a fine game. Mr Stanley Baldwin has just been playing at it – with the novels of the late Mary Webb. I receive with polite reserve the pronouncements of Prime Ministers about imaginative literature. As a rule, either their taste has been distorted by terrible experiences in public schools, and resembles a bicycle after it has been run over by a motor lorry, or they have been too busy conscientiously misguiding the destiny of fifty million human beings properly to nourish their taste. [...] But Mr Stanley Baldwin has made no mistake about Mary Webb. [...] *Precious Bane* however, can scarcely count among those of Mary Webb’s novels which are in a state of suspended vitality. It has been reprinted every year since its original publication [...] Mary Webb has power; she could create beauty; and she is truthful concerning human nature. All I would say against her is that her writing is somewhat mannered. If Mr Baldwin’s remark has a sequel in the shape of a uniform edition of the Webb novels he may go down to posterity’.

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1980s. Mary Butts by contrast did vanish from sight – she still has no entry in a number of standard reference works – but this was partially because her work was stylistically challenging for the reading public at large, printed in relatively modest runs and lacked a high profile champion.

Ann Suter, in her introduction to *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate: An Archaeology of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (2002), remarks that '[o]ne of the most interesting aspects of working on the Homeric *Hymn* [...] has been to see how often its story is misrepresented in scholarly and popular literature'.⁵ My examination of a constellation of texts from Walter Pater to Mary Butts cheerfully extends and revels in this venerable tradition by indicating how British writers 'misrepresented' the mythic material to re-imagine their own society and to confront – often with fierce panache – the proliferating meanings of race, regionalism, gender, history, class, and narrative form. My goal is not to tailor an ultimate definition of literary myth, nor do I explain why the modernist avant-garde's attempt to 'make it new' involved an ironic turn to purported historical and cultural origins, looking so far 'backward' in time and place for its inspiration. I am more preoccupied by literature that exists on the margins of both the modern movement and myth so as to furnish a fresh, albeit partial, reassessment of all three. Rather than fashioning a teleological argument that moves lockstep through the decades, I propose chapters that detail specific engagements with Demeter-Persephone through which to register distinct literary-cultural shifts in uses of the myth and new insights into the work of particular writers.

While so-called 'high' modernists such as Eliot, Joyce, Yeats, and Pound all have well-documented connections to myth, others writing along the formal and historical peripheries of the modern movement divulge complex, though largely uncharted, relationships as well. Mary Webb and Mary Butts variously reinvent the classical story of 'Mother' and 'Maid' as part of an intricate political and philosophical commentary which seeks to reclaim, consolidate, and enshrine the countryside as a locus of memory, evoking a specifically historicised English past to countermand moribund metropolitan values. Pinpointing the exact textual sources of myths these authors read is less important than acknowledging the fact that these culturally diverse writers share general allusions to Demeter and Persephone as recognisable, archetypal and iconographic images in *fin-de-siècle* Britain. Because this myth is part of a general cultural tradition promoted through narrative, it is unlikely that these writers were specifically inspired by a single textual source.

⁵ Ann Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate: An Archaeology of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 1.

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Chapter 1 surveys an array of cultural commentators, ethnographers, and archaeologists whose accounts of the Demeter-Persephone myth helped erode the exclusive, institutionally entrenched ideology of humanistic Hellenism and the social structures it sustained. The humanistic Hellenism that dominated the early part of the Victorian era concentrated principally on literary-linguistic scholarship, fostering the construction of an educationally privileged male elite and its perception of ancient Greece as the epitome of unsullied and primitive freshness, combined with an ideal of harmonious self-development only to be retrieved with the utmost exertion by later generations. A gradual shift from Latin to Greek in nineteenth-century education attests the symbolic status and cultural kudos of Greek learning, as described by Richard Jenkyns in *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (1980), Frank Turner's *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (1981), G. W. Clarke's *Rediscovering Hellenism* (1989), Richard Dellamora's *Masculine Desire* (1990) and Linda Dowling's *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (1994).

In the 1850s, classical scholars began to implement a more rigorous approach to the ancient world that demonstrated the merit of situating literature within its social and cultural contexts. The refinement of such research fields as archaeology permitted those without extensive literary-linguistic training in the classics to assume authority and professional credibility. Meanwhile, those outside academia like Thomas Hardy became acquainted with classical scholarship through middlebrow magazines, which often fuelled lively debates about the social and intellectual significance of Greek myth, thus making Hellas, according to Artemis Leontis, 'the most disputed province of Western thought'.⁶

Recent critics have traced the formation of masculine identities and the mediation of male longing in Victorian Britain through an idealised version of archaic Greece. That Jane Harrison features at the outset of Chapter 1 and throughout this study reminds us there is still much to do on the sexual politics of Victorian Hellenism, the entry of women into Greek studies, and particularly their increased access to formal education. The age of English university reform included not only the revolution of the dons but also the foundation of the women's colleges.⁷ Although women were not awarded

⁶ Artemis Leontis, *Topographies of Hellenism: Mapping the Homeland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 17.

⁷ On the changing structure of higher education in late-Victorian Britain, see Sheldon Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons: Cambridge and Society in Victorian England* (London: Faber, 1968) and *Tradition and Change in English Liberal Education: An Essay in History and Culture* (London: Faber, 1976). On women's entry into Cambridge, see Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge: A Men's University, Though of a Mixed Type* (London: Gollancz, 1975); *Cambridge Women: Twelve Portraits*, ed. by Edward Shils and Carmen Blacker (Cambridge:

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official degrees at Oxford and Cambridge until well into the next century, women were finally able to exploit the powers and advantages of Greek learning within a university milieu. Harrison was among the first generation of women who acquired Greek at Cambridge University; she began a long-term association with Newnham, one of two women's colleges within the university, in 1874, after education at home by governesses in her upper-middle class family and at Ladies' College, Cheltenham. Harrison returned to Newnham in 1898 as Resident Lecturer in Classical Archaeology and continued teaching Classics at Cambridge until 1922. For a writer such as Mary Butts, Harrison stripped away the seemingly antiquarian and hidebound discourses of Hellenism to establish dissident configurations of gender and sexuality.⁸

What we perceive of the Greeks, according to Burne-Jones is 'a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be'. My opening chapter signifies that instead of promulgating classical Greece as the pinnacle of cultural finesse and jovial confidence, Walter Pater and Jane Harrison each intimated a darker, more troubling, and transgressive vision of the archaic past largely inscrutable to modern rationality and haunted by a sense of social and political unrest. Pater's writings on Greek myth, formulated within the institutional context of Oxford Hellenism, say much about shifting depictions of the ancient Greek world from the mid-nineteenth century to the outbreak of the Great War.

The first chapter of Harrison's seminal 1903 *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* begins with a quotation of 'lovely words' from 'Mr Ruskin', who declares the '[e]verlasting calm in the presence of all Fate' and 'beauty at perfect rest' of the Greeks and believes 'there is no dread in their hearts'.⁹ Harrison's revisionary Hellenism dismantles this picture of the Greek as 'the favoured child of fortune yet ever unspoilt' by excavating a 'lower' and more

Cambridge University Press, 1996). On women's entry into Oxford see Vera Brittain, *The Women at Oxford: a Fragment of History* (New York: Macmillan, 1960); Susan J. Leonardi, *Dangerous by Degrees: Women at Oxford and the Somerville College Novelists* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

⁸ For a reassessment of Harrison's place within the history of Classical scholarship and the influence of her work on current theories of ritual and myth, see Harry C. Payne, 'Modernizing the Ancients: The Reconstruction of Ritual Drama 1870-1920', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 122 (1978), 182-92; Albert Henrichs, 'Loss of Self, Suffering and Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 82 (1984), 205-40; Hugh Lloyd-Jones, 'Jane Ellen Harrison', in *Cambridge Women*, ed. by Shils and Blacker, 29-71; H. S. Versnel, 'What's Sauce for the Goose is Sauce for the Gander: Myth and Ritual, Old and New', in *Approaches to Greek Myth*, ed. by Lowell Edmunds (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 25-90.

⁹ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, ed. and intro. by Robert Ackerman (1903; repr. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 1. Hereafter referred to as *PGR*.

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‘fearful stratum of religion’: like Pater she canvasses the feverish intensity of Dionysian worship, its ‘primitive’ and ‘barbarous’ rites of possession, over the unclouded tranquillity of the Olympian pantheon (*PGR*, p. 1). Harrison visited Pater once and found him to be a ‘soft, kind cat’, who ‘purred so persuasively that I lost the sense of what he was saying’.¹⁰ Yet she distils the essence of what he was saying in another respect, as she signals a desire for multiplied consciousness in his eroticised portrayal of Demeter-Persephone that infuses her own elucidation of the myth.¹¹

Chapter 2 analyses the ‘Mother’ and ‘Maid’ in Victorian poetry, opening with Jean Ingelow’s ‘Persephone’ and its relation to Victorian gender politics. Ingelow’s cryptic text evinces how the Demeter-Persephone myth enabled woman writers to underscore (and debunk) marriage as a sacrificial ceremonial and rite of initiation. I compare interpretations of the myth by Algernon Charles Swinburne, George Meredith and Alfred Lord Tennyson with those of underappreciated female poets such as Dora Greenwell and Mathilde Blind, for whom the religious mystery dramatises the dislocating descent of women at turning points in their spiritual growth and the painful necessity, or compulsion, to repudiate knowledge, caste and expertise – in short, to abandon a specific place or role in the social world.

Chapter 3 treats Hardy’s novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* as a text which stages the sacrifice of a Persephone figure of immense stature, in whom are located profound and mysterious forces, mediated and seen on occasions involving a process similar to transfiguration. From the moment Tess Durbeyfield is distinguished by her white muslin dress at the May-time Marlott ‘Cerealia’ until she is ‘unfurled’ as a black flag over Wintonchester gaol after her execution, Hardy’s goddess never transcends the traumatic consequences of her ‘underworld’ experiences with Alec d’Urberville and Angel Clare. That Hardy lays bare the *breaking*, rather than *making* of an earth-goddess stems from his anguished awareness of a deep and genuine loss, or perversion, of what is ‘natural’, rendering it impossible profoundly to entertain traditional mythological representation as a means of invigorating a barren milieu.

Chapter 4 takes up the little known writing of Mary Webb, considering the novel *Gone to Earth* both in its own right and as it relates to Hardy’s mature artistic vision. Webb warrants more assiduous scholarly attention as an author whose fiction undertakes a bitter reappraisal of the Persephone

¹⁰ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Reminiscences of a Student’s Life* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), p. 46.

¹¹ Harrison prefaced her *Studies in Greek Art* with a Paterian flourish by asserting that ‘an impression of the senses’ is derived from the contemplation of Greek art and by presenting her own impressions in written form, so that readers ‘may nurture their souls on the fair sights and pure visions of Ideal art’. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Introductory Studies in Greek Art* (London: Unwin, 1885), pp. v, vii.

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myth as it is woven into the imaginative fabric of *Tess*.¹² Like her admired predecessor, Webb cannot salvage an effectual means of utilizing the traditional material to achieve the bold placement of woman's agency as central to the enterprise of cultural regeneration, demonstrating how she can intercede in and radically remodel historical and mythic narratives.

Chapter 5 probes E. M. Forster's fiction as a bracing though ultimately stymied quest for 'Demeter's English Garden'. It is well known that Forster was invested in the Demeter of Cnidus, and as early as Frederick Crews's 1960 essay 'E. M. Forster: The Limitations of Mythology', scholars have attended to the core place of the earth-goddess in *The Longest Journey* (1907) and *Howards End* (1910). Lionel Trilling, one of the most ebullient of Forster's early critics, noted with some unease: 'surely the Greek myths made too deep an impression' on Forster, whose allusions to ancient Greece evoked 'open skies and athleticism', 'love and democracy'.¹³ In the words of Richard Jenkyns, Hellas had become 'a peg to hang one's preconceptions upon'.¹⁴ Peter Jeffreys and others delineate how Forster's obsession with Greece stemmed largely from his study of Classics at Cambridge with Nathaniel Wedd (1864-1940).¹⁵ Wedd was Lecturer in Classics and Ancient History at King's College, Forster's tutor and a key influence on his early intellectual growth. Less thoroughly comprehended is to what degree Forster's approach seeks to uncover the English 'Demeter' – a primeval potency that might refurbish the etiolated mythological annals of his homeland. This complicates the standard view of a Forster merely working out of established literary and historical traditions that both exploited and reified Hellenism. Forster's endeavour to disclose the hidden life at its source collapses because of the trivialising aesthetic dilettantism that he fails to exorcise entirely from the imaginative patterns of his fiction. Though employing facets of Jane Harrison's anthropological findings (such as autochthony), he ends up merely dabbling in them. The chapter poses, is Forster a version of Angel Clare, lacking in matured precision of judgment, prone to lofty whimsicality, an unsound exponent of the verbiage of Hellenic paganism?

D. H. Lawrence's undervalued 1920 novel *The Lost Girl* is the subject of Chapter 6. Lawrence's relentlessly unsentimental deployment of the Persephone myth in this text exposes the banality of cultural and novelistic conventions – particularly those that espouse maudlin portrayals of romantic

¹² On Webb's 'Hardyesque' pungency see Chris Baldick, *The Modern Movement. The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 10: 1910-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 290-91.

¹³ Lionel Trilling, *E. M. Forster* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), pp. 38, 30.

¹⁴ Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 297.

¹⁵ See Peter Jeffreys, *Eastern Questions: Hellenism and Orientalism in the Writings of E. M. Forster and C. P. Cavafy* (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2005).

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love and bourgeois matrimony. And yet, as hard-bitten as *The Lost Girl* is, its venturesome Persephone figure Alvina Houghton will not be cowed by brutish male dominance; rather, she survives the underworld of the squalid Italian village at the end of the novel (while Tess Durbeyfield, by comparison, suffers considerably in Hardy's vision of 'hell on earth' at Flintcomb-Ash). While it is not new to claim of Lawrence's oeuvre that it validates the anti-rational over the rational, the chthonic and not the surface, or even to posit that Lawrence implements myth to express these forces, his Persephone in *The Lost Girl* unexpectedly irradiates a far-reaching conception of the nether realm and its cathartic potential. Lawrence succeeds in transfiguring the category of the 'primitive'.

The spiky pastoral fiction of Mary Butts constitutes Chapter 7, noting her connections to Hardy, Forster and Lawrence and to the Cambridge Ritualists, whose anthropological project Butts views as consistent with her own – to amend the 'primitive' from an irretrievable developmental stage in the history of civilisation to a more fulfilling mode of being. She asks whether we can reinvent the matriarchal past, so that what seems like a defunct historical epoch can become a viable and invigorating life-style, capable of emulation in the contemporary political arena. Moreover, her abiding fascination with salvaging classical and mythical structures offers alternatives to heterosexuality and undermines dichotomised notions about gender roles. In 1916 Butts reflected that there is 'no such thing as man and woman – but there is sex – a varying quantity'.¹⁶ However, her fiction ultimately retreats from the productive disturbance of conventional hierarchies epitomised by this 'varying quantity' to affirm a reactionary politics of class, race and 'fertility'.

Butts's version of Persephone (as she is explored in the novels *Ashe of Rings* (1925), *Armed with Madness* (1928) and *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932)) emerges as a priestess of the ancestral privileges of the 'truly English'. Persephone blends with Butts's uncompromising vision of the nation – a racially specific rustic motherland – that she situates in Dorset, from whose primitive terrain she extracts monuments to her own aesthetic and ontological ideals. The feminine as embodied by Persephone is the force and figure that can not only tap the primal, perennial energies of Dorset but also expunge would-be foreign interlopers and return the world to its rightful, indigenous, patrician inheritors. That Butts's conception of the ancient goddess is driven by a conviction that the modern moment required a renewal of the link between the ethical and supernatural domains is unremarkable. What seems to me unique is her literary evocation of her south Dorset

¹⁶ Quoted in Jane Garrity, 'Mary Butts' in *Encyclopedia of British Women's Writing, 1900-1950*, ed. by Faye Hammill, Esme Miskimmin and Ashlie Sponenberg (London: Palgrave, 2006), p. 38.

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birthplace as an anthropological 'stage', set with all the properties of mystery, upon which to measure the potential of a numinous formulation of femininity.

Chapter 1

Excavating the Dark Half of Hellas

I

A thing has little charm for me unless it has on it the patina of age. Great things in literature, Greek plays for example, I most enjoy when behind their bright splendours I see moving darker and older shapes. That must be my *apologia pro vita mea*.¹

The Lord thy God is the invisible stranger at the gate in the night, knocking. He is the mysterious life-suggestion, tapping for admission. And the wondrous Victorian Age managed to fasten the door so tight, and light up the compound so brilliantly with electric light, that really, there was no outside, it was all in. The Unknown became a joke: is still a joke.²

In the first extract, pioneering feminist classicist Jane Ellen Harrison commends and cherishes ‘Greek plays’ for their capability to divulge ‘darker and older shapes’. Harrison’s profound sympathy with these ‘older’ entities lurking beneath the burnished surface of artefacts, pictures and texts is much more than antiquarian zeal for the forgotten fragments of bygone ages. The ancient things which beguile her and which must be conserved are precisely the things that are not yet defunct, that still impact upon the modern moment in unheralded and startling ways. These unearthly ‘shapes’ are linked to D.H. Lawrence’s perception of passionate non-rational structures, a ‘mysterious life-suggestion’, whose presence ‘the wondrous Victorian Age’ is bent on excluding in his 1923 novel *Kangaroo*. Lawrence wryly asserts the trivialisation of the ‘dark’ elemental potencies embodied by Demeter and Persephone during the nineteenth century. Seeking to resuscitate those potentialities of thought, feeling and imagination channelled through the creation and transformation of classical mythology, he impishly alludes to the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (*Matthew* 25: 1-13), in which the

¹ Harrison, *Reminiscences of a Student's Life* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), pp. 86-87. Harrison here refers to the book written by John Henry Newman (1801-90), the Anglican theologian who converted to Catholicism in 1845 and later became a Cardinal, *Apologia pro vita sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions* (1864). Harrison’s paraphrase may allude to her similar reaction against her Anglican background and to her own ‘conversion’ – to the anthropology of Greek religion.

² D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, ed. by Bruce Steele (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 285.

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virgins represent Christians waiting for Christ. Even if Jesus is slow to arrive, stresses the parable, they must be unceasingly vigilant and keep their lamps ready. In the nineteenth century, the dizzying rate of scientific discovery ensured that 'electric light' gradually superseded lamps.

Lawrence's magisterially dismissive account identifies what he sees as the deficiencies of an exacting rationalist orientation, opposing his intuitive being and aesthetic aspirations to the pragmatic limitations of unenlightened utilitarian imperatives, which are acerbically imaged as a secure, *well-lit* 'compound'. This tyrannically systematising and super-civilised Victorian mind was, according to Lawrence, revered at the expense of 'the mysterious life-suggestion': instances of multiplied sensuous perception an individual could not fully voice and of which he was not always conscious. Lawrence contends with blustering verve that behind the sanctimonious superiority of the Victorian scientific priesthood was a deep distrust of an unconscious primitive self, of the chthonic darkness beyond and below the 'compound'.³ Lawrence impugns the habit of many mid-nineteenth century ethnologists to gauge history as a vertical continuum in which non-Western natives and their 'primitive' cultures were infantilised, rooted firmly to the bottom of the social evolutionary scale that began with so-called 'savagery', proceeding through 'barbarism', and culminated in the apex of Western Victorian 'civilisation'.⁴

Clinging to the language of bland rationality as the principal means of arranging felt experience, 'the Victorian Age' in Lawrence's sardonic critique lamentably failed to register how its own culture's analytical, authoritarian, and hierarchical strategies stifled creative synthesis and eventually overwhelmed the mediation of polarities traditionally proffered in Lawrence's version of the Persephone myth. 'I honestly think', he states in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 'that the great pagan world of which Egypt and Greece were the last living terms, the great pagan world which preceded our own era once, had a vast and perhaps perfect science of its own, a science in terms of life'.⁵ Lawrence signifies that the dark gods must be made to address a society where individuals are fragmented in consciousness, routinely thwarted in their attempt to reconcile opposing tendencies, haunted by

³ Lawrence's critique would have found favour with Mary Butts, whose recollections of a late-nineteenth century childhood echo Lawrence's terms in *Kangaroo*: 'I grew to look on the people who should have helped me as poor afraid creatures, afraid to enjoy themselves, afraid to tell the truth to themselves or to anyone else; realising that that Victorian age had raised a special series of taboos unknown in any other.' See Mary Butts, *The Crystal Cabinet: My Childhood at Salterns* (London: Carcanet, 1988), p. 46. Hereafter referred to as CC.

⁴ See for instance Lewis Morgan, *Ancient Society* (Chicago: Kerr, 1877), p. 9.

⁵ D. H. Lawrence, 'Fantasia of the Unconscious' and 'Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious' (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 12.

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impulses and appetites they would repress but which they cannot altogether regulate.

Lawrence's pointed reference to the brilliantly lit Victorian 'compound' mischievously summons up *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) in which Matthew Arnold, reacting to the political turmoil, potentially the worst in Britain for thirty-five years, that arose during the period culminating in the Second Reform Bill (1866-7), coined the phrase 'sweetness and light' to characterise the humanistic values of decorous order and civility – 'the best that has been thought in the world'⁶ – he identified with Hellenism.⁷ Arnold's phrase came to epitomise the supposedly unblemished serenity of a 'bright' Greek civilisation, by which was meant fifth-century Athens, in contrast to the searing sense of his own era as 'an age of spiritual discomfort', tardy in embracing the Hellenic repose, moderation and impeccable balance of mind that would act as the moral corrective necessary to a tainted national culture.⁸ In one of his notebooks Arnold copied the following extract from F. A. Wolf: 'The Greek ideal is this; a purely human education, and elevation of all the powers of mind and soul to a beautiful harmony of the inner and outer man'.⁹ At the core of Arnold's definition of ancient Greece was a human grace that would coax and cajole formerly irredeemable working-class subjects into channelling their unfocused yearnings back into the cultural mainstream of bourgeois society. The 'bent' of Arnold's Hellenism 'drives at' an 'unclouded clearness of mind, an unimpeded play of thought',¹⁰ appropriating and cleansing anterior pagan cultural practices in the Christian interest.

⁶ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*, ed. by J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 70.

⁷ For a scrupulous historical overview of the Hellenist tradition from Tractarianism to the Oscar Wilde trials, see Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 32-35; 104-17. Dowling uses the term 'Hellenism' to denote the modern appropriations of Greek thought, culture, and practice (especially the warrior ideal) by educated Britons in the Victorian period as a counter-discourse to post-French Revolution republicanism.

⁸ Arnold felt acutely the difficulty of writing poetry amid what he thought of as the joyless materialism of modern England; in 1853 he wrote: '[i]n the sincere endeavour to learn and practice, amid the bewildering confusion of our times, what is sound and true in practical art, I seemed [...] to find the only sure guidance, the only sure footing, among the ancients. They [...] knew what they wanted in art, and we do not. It is this uncertainty which is disheartening, and not hostile criticism.' See 'Preface' to *Poems* (1853) in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by R. H. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1960-78), I, 14. Linda Dowling attributes the growth of Hellenism at Oxford especially to the quest for values to transcend mid-century materialism. See Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality*, p. 31.

⁹ Quoted in Stephen Prickett, "'Hebrew' versus 'Hellene'" as a Principle of Literary Criticism' in *Rediscovering Hellenism: The Hellenic Inheritance and the English Imagination*, ed. by G. W. Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 147.

¹⁰ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 132.

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To Lawrence, this sanitisation, motivated by a blend of paternalistic righteousness, Christian piety and resigned nostalgia reduced the 'Unknown' to a 'joke'. Like many features of Hellenism in mid-Victorian Britain, Arnold's theorisation had its origins in German scholarship. As Frank Turner remarks, during this period most Hellenic research 'invoked prescriptive images of Greek civilization that supported the social and moral values of the traditional British elites as models for the new middle class leaders of the nation'.¹¹ As late as 1928, H. J. Rose's immensely popular *Handbook of Greek Mythology* notes that '[t]he Greeks at their best were sane, high-spirited, clear-headed, beauty-loving optimists, and not in the least other-worldly. Hence their legends are almost without exception free from the cloudiness, the wild grotesques, and the horrible features' that 'beset the popular traditions of less gifted and happy peoples'.¹²

That the Demeter-Persephone myth, with its unnerving images of abduction, random violence, wrath, and rape, was considered suitably 'bright' material for the moral edification of mid-Victorian children reflects a widely held view of the ancient Greeks as a blithe, sportive, and carefree race in which, 'man is at unity with himself, with his physical nature, with the outward world'.¹³ In 1853 Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* was published, a collection of classical myths retold for children. Hawthorne included a story entitled 'The Pomegranate Seeds', his expurgated version of the Persephone myth in which the maiden goddess is surprisingly content with having been snatched by Hades and transported to his palace: she 'was not quite so unhappy as you may have supposed. The immense palace had a thousand rooms, and was full of beautiful and wonderful objects'.¹⁴ For

¹¹ Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 448. Turner makes a persuasive case for the intellectual confidence of the Victorian ruling classes deriving from their knowledge of the classical world. On Britain's rising upper middle class and their concept of 'Athenian' traits of dignity, self-control, patriotic fervour, and individualism as virtues to which they could aspire, see Harry C. Payne, 'Modernizing the Ancients: The Reconstruction of Ritual Drama 1870-1920', *Proceedings of the American Philological Society*, 122 (1978), 183.

¹² H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London: Methuen, 1928), p. 14.

¹³ Quoted in Ruth Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism: The Ancient World in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 15.

¹⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. by William Charvat and others (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), VII, p. 322. *Tanglewood Tales* was Hawthorne's last completed book of fiction written in America and his final children's book. In this collection, Hawthorne sifts through classical mythology for the archetypal scenarios and themes of deprivation and alienation that he could not otherwise articulate. In 'The Pomegranate Seeds', both 'Ceres' (Demeter) and 'Proserpina' (Persephone) are rendered helpless by circumstances, endure irretrievable loss, and, with modified expectations and the burden of experience, reshape their lives around their new, confined circumstances. Hawthorne's major source for the myths in *Tanglewood Tales* is Charles Anthon's 1841 *Classical Dictionary*, which was a popular handbook on mythology and may

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Francis Turner Palgrave, in 'The Birth of Art' from *Idylls and Songs* (1854), the Persephone myth offered a vista of 'that bright morning' of Greek equilibrium between body and mind, untarnished by muddled debates over 'faith' versus 'reason': 'the sore labour of man's o'erstrain'd wit, / To heal the faith that reason blights with scorning' (ll. 83-91).¹⁵ In his preface to *The Heroes* (1855), Charles Kingsley stated that 'next to those old Romances, which were written in the Christian middle age, there are no fairy tales like these old Greek ones, for beauty, and wisdom, and truth, and for making children love noble deeds, and trusting in God to help them through'.¹⁶ Enshrined within a model of 'universal human experience'¹⁷ and embedded in narratives of European heritage that helped specify and stabilise the upper middle class, this conception of Greek antiquity is to Lawrence devoid of cultural ferment, stifling positive and productive ebullitions of historical change.¹⁸

Lawrence's imaginative quest for a more dynamic recycling of the Demeter-Persephone myth overhauls the hegemonic mid-Victorian discourse of humanistic Hellenism which isolates ideal from real past and segregates Greece from evolutionary development, and thus from nagging cultural disquiet. Walter Pater, in the first part of his 1876 essay on 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone' similarly deplored the 'familiar view' of Greek religion as a 'religion of mere cheerfulness, the worship by an [...] unreflecting humanity, conscious of no deeper needs, of the embodiments of its own joyous activity'.¹⁹ Indeed, an 'awareness of the dark side of Hellas',

explain Hawthorne's use of Roman sources and names as well as the marked Romanizing of Greek myth. See Hugo McPherson, *Hawthorne as Myth-Maker* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

¹⁵ Francis Turner Palgrave, 'The Birth of Art' in *Idylls and Songs, 1848-1854* (London: Parker, 1854), pp. 50-51.

¹⁶ Charles Kingsley, *The Heroes: Or Greek Fairy Tales for my Children* (1855), in *The Life and Works of Charles Kingsley*, 19 vols (London: Macmillan, 1903), XIX, pp. 212-13.

¹⁷ Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, p. 51.

¹⁸ See Ian Morris, *Classical Greece: Ancient Histories and Modern Archaeologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 14; also Michael Shanks, *Classical Archaeology of Greece: Experiences of the Discipline* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 68. For an assessment of the class and professional interests invested in classical idealism in late-Victorian England see Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed: School, University, and Society in England, 1830-1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 148-54, 202-32.

¹⁹ Walter Pater, *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 110. Hereafter referred to as GS. As early as 1867 Pater had claimed that Winckelmann's 'limitation' was to have conceived of the Greek ideal only within 'a world of exquisite but abstract and colourless form', failing to perceive what Pater calls 'a sort of preparation for the romantic temper' in it, and therefore offering a reductive, because partial, representation of its significance. See Walter Pater, 'Winckelmann' in *The New Library Edition of the Works of Walter Pater* (London: Macmillan, 1910), I, pp. 223-24.

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according to Stefano Evangelista, ‘had characterized Pater’s approach to classical culture from the beginning of his literary career’.²⁰

To Lawrence, Arnold’s idealised depiction of Hellenism – rendered canonical by Winckelmann’s studies²¹ – was a sterile, unavailing and craven disavowal of the violent derangement beyond the Victorian moral ‘compound’. Rape, incest, and promiscuity were perhaps the dominant modes of procreation among divinities in the early phases of the universe, during which the majority of gods were born and acquired their powers. Zeus and Demeter, a brother and sister, produced Persephone in precisely this fashion, a process which clashes with the overarching image of the ancient Greek as an unruffled child of the human race basking in the sunlight of the early ages. Arnold’s Hellenism ratifies a concept of cultural continuity simultaneously protecting and preserving the ‘child’ from the potentially deleterious effects of historical flux. Though Lawrence was by no means the first to castigate this neurotic denial, he does show with bullish intensity how an individual should face and surmount this fear of atavism so as to reunite with the psychic potencies epitomised, in his opinion, by ‘Demeter, Persephone’ and ‘the halls of Dis’. For Lawrence, immersion in these elemental chthonic energies is enabling, purgative, even revelatory, or what Mary Butts would call ‘the profoundest spiritual adventure’ (CC, p. 41).

II

The oldest, most complete, and well-known extant version of the Demeter-Persephone myth is the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Composed in dactylic hexameter verse (the same metre used in the Homeric epics), the *Hymn* was probably written between 650-550 B.C.E by an unknown bard, and celebrates the Greek goddess of grain Demeter and her only daughter Kore (‘maiden’) or Persephone.²² Though the myth unfolds in diverse ways, the essence of the

²⁰ Stefano Evangelista, “‘Outward Nature and the Moods of Men’: Romantic Mythology in Pater’s Essays on Dionysus and Demeter”, in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2002), p. 107. See also David J. De Laura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 177. De Laura contends that the addition of the Dionysian element makes Pater’s view of Greece ‘considerably more complex than Arnold’s, rather better informed, and more historically authentic.’

²¹ See Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art among the Greeks* (London: Chapman, 1855).

²² The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* illuminates the following divine genealogy: Gaia (Earth) and Ouranos (Sky) are the parents of Rhea and Kronos, who are in turn parents of Zeus, Hades, and Demeter. Zeus and Hades are thus both sons of Kronos. Demeter and Zeus are the parents of Kore/Persephone.

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tragedy is simple. Kore is enticed by the beauty of the lush meadow, strays from her companions and innocently wanders to gather roses, lilies, crocuses, violets, and hyacinths. Suddenly, the earth opens and the Lord of the Dead (Hades or Aidoneus) springs out and seizes her against her will, sweeping her off in his golden car to be his queen in the world below. The scene of the abduction, which may have been in any part of Demeter's far-ranging domain, was said to be at Eleusis. Crazy with grief, Demeter roams the world searching for news of her daughter without success for nine days and nights. On the tenth day, she encounters Hecate, who knows no more than she does. Demeter and Hecate consult Helios, who informs them that Zeus gave Persephone to Hades to be his bed-mate. Bereaved and enraged, Demeter returns to Eleusis disguised as an old woman and gathers evidence of Hades's guilt and Zeus's connivance in the abduction.²³ She blights the earth with barrenness until Kore is restored to her. Alarmed, and after several futile pleas to Demeter, Zeus orders Hades to return the maiden to her mother.²⁴ Hades complies, but not before he has tempted Kore to eat the pomegranate that binds her to the world below. Compromising both with Hades and Demeter, Zeus permits Kore to live in the upper world for two-thirds of the year, but one-third is to be spent in the Underworld. Demeter's unalloyed joy in her reunion with her daughter is thus forever shadowed by the bitter knowledge of Kore's yearly departure for the infernal realm. Nevertheless, she transforms the dusty fields to golden grain, revealing to the princes of Eleusis her rites and sacred mysteries. Hecate, a mythic 'double' of Demeter, is entrusted with the task of watching over Kore/Persephone; Demeter returns to Olympus, and the revelations at Eleusis become the origins for the sacred rituals enacted there yearly.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* itself refers in detail only to the mythical origins of preliminary rites at Eleusis, a location situated on a trade route approximately fourteen miles west of Athens.²⁵ The Eleusinian mysteries

²³ Zeus's authorising of the abduction is often emphasised in later versions influenced by the *Hymn*. By contrast, in Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae*, Jupiter (the Roman Zeus) bows to the demands of fate and Pluto (Hades). In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Venus (Aphrodite) sets the story in motion by having Cupid (Eros) shoot a love dart into Pluto. A concerned patriarch, Ovid's Jupiter responds at once to Ceres's (Demeter's) appeal, although he sees the advantage of the match.

²⁴ Zeus's connivance in the abduction of Persephone inaugurates a series of displacements in the *Homeric Hymn*, in which gods move into spheres where they were not present before, or stand apart from each other. Demeter's withdrawal first from Olympus and then into her temple during the famine structurally parallels her daughter's forced removal into the subterranean world. The fact that mother and daughter are separated at the time of the abduction implies that Persephone is moving towards maturity and independence from her mother. Again, in contrast to some later versions but in keeping with Homeric conventions, Zeus remains remote throughout the poem.

²⁵ Most of the earlier editors of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* treated the poem as a religious rather than literary, document: '[g]reat as is the poetical value of the hymn, perhaps its chief

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were the most important of the widespread Greek mystery cults of antiquity. They began sometime in the middle of the second millennium before the Christian era and continued to be celebrated at least once a year until 396 CE when a false priest claiming access to them corrupted the rites. In nearly fifteen hundred years, virtually no one betrayed their innermost secrets; what little we know comes to us via literary or historical allusions, or from Christian denouncements of pagan practices. The Mysteries were considered so vital to both Greece and the world at large that in 364 CE one Roman official – himself a worshipper of the gods and an Eleusinian initiate – pleaded their case before a Catholic emperor who sought to abolish them. To the celebrant, participation in the Mysteries provided life without fear in the face of death. Most likely originating in Crete, the Mysteries were open to all. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* offers a mythical explanation for the institution of what later became the most exalted of the mystery cults of antiquity; the pride of the city of Athens, the Eleusinian Mysteries survived until the hallowed site was destroyed, probably by Alaric the Goth in 395 CE. Pausanias, writing in the second century CE, said of the Mysteries that '[e]arlier Greeks considered the Eleusinian rite as being much more to be honoured than all other religious rituals as gods are honoured above heroes'.²⁶

In its entirety, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* comprises a female version of the heroic quest that plays a core role in the Mediterranean and Near Eastern epic from as early as the Sumerian *Gilgamesh*. The triumph in this drama was not simply about human survival and recovery from abduction and violation, but the overcoming of a specific vision of death that snatched away the young, the barely begun, the still-maturing Persephone.²⁷ Whilst conserving and elaborating the most coherent form of the myth, the author of the *Homeric Hymn* screens out many of its more archaic elements.²⁸ These

interest lies in the fact that it is the most ancient and the most complete document bearing on the Eleusinian Mysteries'. See *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, ed. by T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday and E. E. Sikes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 7.

²⁶ Quoted in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary and Interpretive Essays*, ed. by Helene P. Foley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 80.

²⁷ On the 'triumph' implicit in the Persephone myth see Kathie Carlson, *Life's Daughter/Death's Bride: Inner Transformations through the Goddess Demeter/Persephone* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997); Josephine Donovan, *After the Fall: The Demeter-Persephone Myth in Wharton, Cather, and Glasgow* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989); *The Long Journey Home: Re-visioning the Demeter Myth for Our Time*, ed. by Christine Downing (Boston: Shambhala, 1994).

²⁸ Although there can never be a definitive text of the Persephone myth, the *Homeric Hymn*, as the earliest surviving written document, has played an incalculable role in disseminating the myth. Other early recorded versions of the Persephone story, also from the classical period, are found in Hesiod's *Theogony* and in hymns. The Orphic version (which Euripides employed as a source for his *Helena*, and used in turn by the American poet H. D. as a source for her 'Helen in

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are to be found in variants of the myth, which linger only in fragmentary form. While it is usually believed that Demeter's daughter was at least an adolescent at the time of her abduction, one later version of the myth (as recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and especially the *Fasti*)²⁹ portrays her as so callow that she cries as much over the loss of her flowers, which spill to the ground when Hades snatches her, as over being wrested away from maternal solicitude. In art as well, she is depicted variously, some images presenting her as a young woman, others as a vulnerable and naïve child. The most influential Roman version of the myth comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, written in the first century CE. Ovid may have been familiar with the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and employed it as a source for his version of the Persephone story. Proserpina's abduction by Pluto, Ceres's frantic search and extensive grieving, and the eventual partial restoration of maiden to mother are the cornerstones of the Ovidian retelling.³⁰

For Lawrence, this intricately textured myth was a deep mine in which his fellow writers could excavate for untold imaginative treasures. Though artists and scholars were eager to harness and exploit the magical resonance of Greek myth, no single mode of investigation was equally incisive for all mythological traditions. Lawrence revelled in the fact that philosophers, historians, theologians, linguists, political theorists, anthropologists, and literary critics all had some cause to ponder the dual goddess of Demeter-Persephone, though it was difficult to claim as the legitimate and exclusive territory of any one intellectual discipline. His radically revisionist treatment of Persephone in his 1920 novel *The Lost Girl*, is anchored to some extent in a feeling of wonder at the sheer resilience and bewitching fascination of this ancient narrative: weathering the decline of antiquity, surviving the Middle Ages to emerge resplendent in the Renaissance.

The several versions of the myth and the confusion attending the names of Kore, Demeter, and Persephone in no way diminished the richness with which the myth gathered symbolic overtones; in fact, the several glosses permitted a wide range of associations to accrue over the centuries. The resulting ambiguity served poets well as they touched upon one or another facet of the narrative. Walter Pater, exploring the mechanisms at work in the genesis and evolution of ancient myths, affirmed that the imaginative and creative procedures underlying Demeter-Persephone were intertwined with a

Egypt') provides an explanation of the sacrifice of pigs so crucial to the Eleusinian Mysteries, but it makes no mention of the devastating famine caused by a wrathful Demeter that is so prominent in other versions.

²⁹ See Stephen Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³⁰ Ovid adds other elements such as Cyane dissolving into a pool of water and Arethusa discovering and reporting Proserpina's whereabouts to Ceres.

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community's halting endeavour to comprehend and articulate its own most searing impressions. Pater argued that Demeter-Persephone might be scrutinised as a mode of primitive science and encrypted history, adumbrating the partially concealed patterns of human thought.³¹ Lawrence averred that a myth's survival in modified versions was predicated on its capacity to reproduce, at least in part, the cultural values required for its survival.

Ovid and Virgil had enshrined the divinities in the Italian tradition. Geoffrey Chaucer transported them north, and his earliest allusions are explicit and uncomplicated. In *The House of Fame*, the impressionable narrator marvels at the pillars commemorating the august writers of antiquity, focusing at last on the statue of Claudian, 'That bar up al the fame of helle, / Of Pluto, and of Proserpyne, / That queen ys of the derke pyne'.³² Arthur Golding's *Ovid* of 1567 (when Ovid still, as for Chaucer, signified *The Metamorphoses*) embellished the myth with a narrative voice of breezy and puckish extravagance, making the story accessible to the age as much more than an esoteric fragment of classical iconography. Milton prefigures Eve's temptation with a memorable evocation of Persephone in *Paradise Lost* Book IV:

Not that faire field
Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flow'rs
Herself a fairer flow'r by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world. (IV. 268-272)³³

Thereafter the Demeter-Persephone myth is as firmly grounded in English verse as in Latin or Greek. But when the Renaissance light dims, these fertility deities seem to vanish from poetry according to Guy Davenport: '[n]either the eighteenth century nor the early nineteenth century thinks it

³¹ See James Kissane, 'Victorian Mythology', *Victorian Studies*, 6 (1962), 5-28; Gerald Monsman, *Pater's Portraits: Mythic Patterns in the Fiction of Walter Pater* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967); M.F. Moran, 'Pater's Mythic Fiction: Gods in a Gilded Age', in *Pater in the 1990s*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Ian Small (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1991), pp. 169-88; Steven Connor, 'Myth as Multiplicity in Walter Pater's *Greek Studies* and "Denys l'Auxerrois"', *Review of English Studies*, NS 34 (1983), 28-42; Robert and Janice A. Keefe, *Walter Pater and the Gods of Disorder* (Athens: Ohio State University Press, 1988).

³² Geoffrey Chaucer, *The House of Fame* in *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 366, ll. 1510-1512. The 'Proserpyne / pyne' rhyme recurs in *Troilus and Criseyde*: protesting Pandarus's suggestion that he find another love, Troilus vows to love Criseyde until death parts them: 'down with Proserpyne, / When I am ded, I wol go wone in pyne, / And ther I wol eternally compleyne / My wo, and how that twynned be we tweyne' (544, IV. ii. 473-76).

³³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Volume B The Sixteenth Century/The Early Seventeenth Century*, 8th edn (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 1893.

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sees anything in her myth, except to reflect the subterranean existence of her *Paradis artificiel* in such figures as [...] Poe's *Ligeia*.³⁴ Why the myth should rise with such peculiar zest from its obscure artistic underworld into the 'well-lit compound' of Lawrence's 'wondrous Victorian age' is uncertain.³⁵ Direct influence of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* on Western art and literature re-emerges after the discovery in a stable in Moscow of the single mutilated medieval manuscript (dated to the early-fifteenth century) in 1777.

What is undeniable is that this account of a youthful goddess in flux, 'wandering between two worlds', from subterranean murkiness to springtime regeneration, resonated forcefully with a restless and nervously self-questioning generation of intellectuals who seemed to proclaim little of the smug self-regard that Lawrence's *Kangaroo* ascribes to them. Matthew Arnold, however strenuous his need to fashion a resplendent Hellenic principle to shore up the foundations of a national idea, shows his speaker at the Grande Chartreuse unconvinced that a promising new dawn will follow night: '[y]ears hence, perhaps, may dawn an age, More fortunate, alas! than we'.³⁶ Carlyle was tentative as to when that 'dawn' would irradiate his leaden surroundings: '[t]he doom of the Old has long been pronounced [...] but, alas, the New appears not in its stead; the Time is still in pangs of travail with the New'.³⁷ To John Stuart Mill '[t]he present age [...] is an age of transition. Mankind have outgrown [...] old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new

³⁴ Guy Davenport, 'Persephone's Ezra' in *New Approaches to Ezra Pound: A Co-ordinated Investigation of Pound's Poetry and Ideas*, ed. by Eva Hesse (London: Faber, 1969), p. 151. Davenport does not mention Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Song of Proserpine' and Mary Shelley's unpublished verse drama *Proserpine* (1832), both based on Ovid, although a love of things Greek was arguably a more fundamental motive for the reworking of the myth. *Proserpine* stages the dissolution of a matriarchal order in the appropriation and subordination of women under patriarchal rule, resulting in a social dynamic that, in the early nineteenth century, was generally identified as separate-sphere ideology. Shelley's drama, written after the death of her daughter, emphasises the mother's point of view. The poem laments male intervention in a female pastoral paradise and extols Ceres's creativity, capacity to produce fertility, and devotion to her child. See Marjean Purinton, 'Polysexualities and Romantic Generations in Mary Shelley's Mythological Dramas *Midas* and *Proserpine*', *Women's Writing*, 6 (1999), 385-411; Julie Carlson, 'Coming After: Shelley's *Proserpine*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 41 (1999), 351-72; *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein*, ed. by Audrey A. Fisch and Anne K. Mellor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³⁵ Helene P. Foley argues that 'Victorian poets showed a special interest in the *Hymn [to Demeter]*', though her research does not shed light on why these writers would turn to this particular treatment of the myth. See *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, p. 153.

³⁶ Arnold, 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse' (ll. 157), in *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, ed. by Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle (Ontario, Toronto: Broadview, 1999), p. 726.

³⁷ Thomas Carlyle, *The Collected Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by H. D. Traill, 31 vols (London: Chapman, 1896-1899), XXVIII, p. 32.

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ones'.³⁸ 'All ages are ages of transition', Tennyson complained, 'but this is an awful moment of transition'.³⁹

III

Lawrence's tendentious critique in *Kangaroo* implies that any rigorous, sustained enterprise to resuscitate and reconfigure Demeter, Persephone, and other 'dark gods' was not properly inaugurated until after the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'The Dead Pan' (1840) exhorts her fellow writers to 'Look up' to the Christian heavens and not be distracted by the chthonic deities impiously lauded in Schiller's poem *The Gods of Greece* (1788):

O ye vain false gods of Hellas,
Ye are silent evermore! [...]

Get to dust, as common mortals,
By a common doom and track!
Let no Schiller from the portals
Of that Hades, call you back [...]⁴⁰
(ll. 211-12, 218-21)

Barrett Browning's righteous indignation fell largely on deaf ears. To Walter Pater, the myth of Demeter and Persephone was 'perhaps the most popular of all Greek legends' (GS, p. 111). Between 1850 and 1900 not only were the 'vain false gods of Hellas' reclaimed, but also a virtual cult of Demeter-Persephone appeared among a seminal group of poets, artists, ethnographers, and novelists. Lawrence fails to concede that the goddess snatched by Hades from the fields of Enna and dragged down to the shades, to re-emerge at last and reunite with her panic-stricken mother, takes on a complex, multi-layered significance in 'the wondrous Victorian age'.

The years 1857-1859 denote an anthropological and archaeological fault-line, marking not only the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, but also the discovery of artefacts by Charles Newton (1816-1894) at a small cave sanctuary dedicated to Demeter in the ancient Greek port of Cnidus, situated at the end of a long finger of land pointing out into the Aegean sea from the southwest coast of Turkey. In 'the year 1857', Walter Pater explained, the 'discovery of the marbles, in the sacred precinct of

³⁸ J. S. Mill, *The Spirit of the Age*, p. 6.

³⁹ Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1897), II, p. 337.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'The Dead Pan' in *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, p. 73.

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Demeter at Cnidus, restored to us an illustration of the myth in its artistic phase, hardly less central than the Homeric Hymn in its poetical phase'. Knowing, he continues, 'so little, as we do, of the greater mysteries of Demeter, this glance into an actual religious place dedicated to her, and with the air of her worship still about it, is doubly interesting' (GS, pp. 140, 142-43).

Charles Newton was a pioneer of the nascent discipline of archaeology as it battled for a voice in the rendering of ancient Greek cult practices and mythic narratives to modern Europe. Newton was appointed as the first keeper of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum (a post he held from 1861 to 1888).⁴¹ Many artefacts came to the Museum from Newton's digs, the most famous of them being the statues of Demeter and Persephone,⁴² now exhibited with other Cnidian relics in Room 22 of the Hellenistic Gallery.⁴³ Newton's chronicle of his expedition to several Hellenistic sites in Turkey from October 1856 to June 1859 is contained in an elephantine two-volume folio *History of Discoveries at Halicarnassus, Cnidus, and Branchidae*.⁴⁴ Newton's opus manifests the

⁴¹ For Jane Harrison in 1880 the only place to study archaeology in Britain was at the British Museum, under Charles Newton, supplemented by visits to Germany where the universities of Berlin and Munich, supported by their museums, taught classical art and archaeology. Archaeology was inserted into the classical Tripos at Cambridge in 1882. Newton, who eventually became Harrison's mentor, had started his career as an assistant at the British Museum on his graduation from Oxford, at a time when there was one undivided Department of Antiquities. In 1852 he had been appointed vice-consul at Mytilene, where his duties included safeguarding the interests of the British Museum. During this period he excavated the mausoleum at Halicarnassus and brought the remains to the museum. Newton was also instrumental in the foundation of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies (1879), the Egypt Exploration Fund (1882), and the British School at Athens (1885).

⁴² The Cnidian Demeter was first noted by the Dilettanti expedition in 1764; Newton excavated the statue and transported it to the British Museum in 1857-61. Newton, whose lectures on archaeology attracted fashionable audiences in Oxford and London, was a close friend of Ruskin's, who declared that Newton had 'a marvellous power of rapid judgement of all sculptural art'. See 'Letter to John James Ruskin', 28 August 1851, quoted in 'Introduction to Vol. X', *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: Allen, 1903-1912), X, p. xxv.

⁴³ For a summary of Newton's activities for the British Museum in Turkey see Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum, 1800-1939* (London: British Museum, 1992), pp. 168-95.

⁴⁴ Newton in fact wrote three versions of Cnidus. *A History of Discoveries at Halicarnassus, Cnidus, and Branchidae* adopts almost verbatim the brisk, business-like text of his dispatches to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, which was presented to Parliament in the 1858-59 sessions. The reports were published by Parliament under the titles *Papers Respecting the Excavations at Budrun and Further Papers Respecting the Excavations at Budrun and Cnidus*. In 1865 Newton published a mainstream accessible version of *A History of Discoveries*, entitled *Travels and Discoveries in the Levant*, which Pater read in 1874. See Billie Andrew Inman, *Walter Pater and His Reading: 1874-1877* (New York: Garland, 1990), pp. 117-18. Pater's discussion of the statuary is at certain key moments rhetorically more consistent with Newton's

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tensions between archaeology and Arnoldian Hellenism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Chafing against the cheery, child-like Greek ideal and more attuned to anthropological insights, Newton advocated diligent collection and arrangement on typological principles over those of the aesthetic value or rarity prized by dilettanti amateur antiquarians.

Altering focus from art to the inventory and iconographical survey of artefacts, Newton repositioned aesthetic Hellenism within the material culture of everyday life, treating traditionally aestheticised objects such as statuary and ceramics as components of symbolic systems inseparable from their domestic function. Retaining the older character of Demeter-Persephone within the very material body of late Hellenistic sculpture, Newton invited readers to look at statuary in a new way.⁴⁵ Newton's cultural analysis discusses the religious function both of ordinary artefacts and statuary through the familiar narrative of the myth of Demeter-Persephone, but deviates from standard iconographical accounts by fixing the myth within its material trappings in order to 'determine the particular form of worship of which this spot may have been the seat'.⁴⁶ Newton interpreted, for example, the vases at the British Museum as striking textbooks of ritual culture, for they denoted 'the penetration of Greek religion into all details of daily life and revealed religious practices and stories not included in the traditional myths'.⁴⁷

Newton's *History of Discoveries* became the principal source for Pater: '[w]ith the help of the descriptions and plans of Mr Newton's book, we can form [...] a clear idea of the place where these marbles – three statues of the best style of Greek sculpture, now in the British Museum – were found' (GS, p. 140). Newton's exhaustive site report afforded a pellucid picture of the activities of this religious site, a view that could not be recreated in what Newton termed the 'opaque gloom of a London museum'.⁴⁸ Recent commentators rightly acknowledge how Pater's 'hard, patient, conscientious

popular abridged text, which indulges as much adventure, geography, and historical speculation as archaeology.

⁴⁵ Newton's report is largely an inventory of artefacts, to which is appended the scholarly visual ephemera of elevation and architectural drawings and sketches of artefacts executed by his draughtsman R. P. Pullan. This cataloguing impulse invests as much detail to lamps, terracotta figures, dedications, and glass bottles as to statuary. His thorough site report democratises artefacts and, in turn, the methods of examining them. The text's speculative nature represents a clear departure from material Hellenism collected in the museum. Newton, as both agent for the British Museum and purveyor of archaeological data, strives to bring artefacts into clearer cultural focus than is possible within the aesthetic cast of sculpture galleries.

⁴⁶ Charles Newton, *A History of Discoveries at Halicarnassus, Branchidae, and Cnidus* (London, 1862), p. 423.

⁴⁷ Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, p. 123.

⁴⁸ Charles Newton, 'Greek Scriptures from Asia Minor', in *Essays on Art and Archaeology* (London: Macmillan, 1880), p. 84.

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study,⁴⁹ of Demeter-Persephone received an immense stimulus from the discovery of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* fragment in 1777.⁵⁰ But Pater's lingering fascination with 'the deeper mythology of Demeter' (GS, p. 95) is fed at least as much by his sustained appreciation of the archaeological materials unearthed by Newton at Cnidus (GS, p. 140).

Pater was energised by Newton's cataloguing industry and semantic sensitivity to artifactual assessment, giving the most full-fledged delineation of Demeter-Persephone and Greek religious ceremonial as it operated and evolved at Cnidus. Newton's report exposed the hermeneutic restrictions placed on sculpture within Hellenic discourse by confronting aesthetics with an archaeological and anthropological consciousness of the Greeks as busy producers of material culture, rather than material culture as an insipid index of Greek blitheness and geniality. C. L. Dodgson felt that his friend Pater had transfigured Newton's chaotically abundant discoveries at Cnidus, creating 'round every bare idea or fact a multitude of colours and sounds, a whole sensible world [...] for us as for him'.⁵¹ Pater explains,

As regards this story of Demeter and Persephone, what we actually possess is some actual fragments of poetry, some actual fragments of sculpture; and with a curiosity, justified by the direct aesthetic beauty of these fragments, we feel our way backwards to the engaging picture of the poet-people, with which the ingenuity of modern theory has filled the void in our knowledge. (GS, p. 112)

Newton's discoveries at Cnidus permitted Pater to extrapolate symbolic suggestions from Greek material culture, refurbishing Arnoldian notions of Greek repose. By drawing archaeology and mythography into an elaborate narrative of continuity, Pater situated artefacts at a cultural crossroads between a fathomless antiquity and a giddy European modernity. Pater explains that the statuary signifies for him adequate aesthetic expression of the most sophisticated phase of the myth: the figurine of Persephone, a statue of Demeter enthroned, and a life-size freestanding sculpture that Newton believed represented either Demeter in old age or a portrait of a priestess. Together with the humble relics and votive offerings in Newton's report, we see, in Pater's words, the 'two faces of the Greek religion confronting each other', with 'its provincial superstitions, and its curious magic rites, but also

⁴⁹ [C. L.] S[hadwell], 'Preface' to *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays* by Walter Pater (London: Macmillan, 1895), p. 4. On Pater's introduction in his works of ideas from the new social sciences see Inman, 'Work in Progress, Almost in Press', *Pater Newsletter*, 17 (1986), 9; and Inman, 'The Emergence of Pater's Marius Mentality: 1874-1875', *English Literature in Transition*, 27 (1984), 100-123.

⁵⁰ See Lesley Higgins, 'But Who is "She": Forms of Subjectivity in Walter Pater's Writings', *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 24 (1997), 37-65.

⁵¹ C. L. Dodgson, 'Greek Studies by Walter Pater', *Academy* (16 March 1895), 229.

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with its means of really solemn impressions, in the culminating forms of Greek art' (GS, p. 142). Pater, with the help of Newton's material evidence linked the mystical, earth-bound expression of chthonic worship with the sensuous aesthetics of a rarefied sculptural humanism.

Pater speculates in his 1876 essay that 'it might seem, when we consider the interest of the [Demeter-Persephone] story in itself, and its importance in the Greek religion, that no adequate expression of it had remained to us in works of art' (GS, p. 140). But Newton's *History of Discoveries* endeavoured to fill in these glaring gaps. Pater turned to Newton's lengthy and lavishly annotated site reports on Cnidian Demeter's cave sanctuary to salvage contextual meaning for the museum pieces. Foregrounding the poetic and subjective nature of mother and daughterhood, Pater transmutes the materials of Newton's archaeology into a distinctly feminine historical trope. Newton's assiduous reliance upon objective data and notions of historical change inaugurated a persistent archaeological challenge to the joyous static Hellenism that Pater recalibrates through adherence to the Hegelian notion that all modes of culture are inherently dialectical.

IV

It is a piquant irony that many of the figures to whom Lawrence owed an imaginative debt in terms of unlocking the 'door' to the chthonic deities 'tapping for admission' were the very same rationalist Victorian scientists given such short shrift by *Kangaroo's* imperious narrator. Charles Newton's most renowned student, Jane Ellen Harrison, subsequently employed these materials in her expose of the dark gods who inhabited the irrational under-texture of Greek fertility cults. Harrison, reflecting on the 1871 publication of *The Descent of Man* in her 1909 pamphlet *The Influence of Darwinism on the Study of Religions*, inferred that research into primitive matriarchal deities 'has been made possible, and even inevitable, by the theory of Evolution', liberating humanity from the 'presupposition that the essence of religion is dogma'. It was thanks to Darwin, Harrison opined, that the genesis and evolution of religious phenomena could finally be measured, like other phenomena, in a scientific way, that is, as a complex anthropological process. Instead of the inflexible images of Arnoldian Hellenism, evolutionist theory postulated endless mutability, 'the continuity of life, the absence of breaks', the "acquirement of each mental capacity [even religion] by gradation". With these 'memorable words',

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the door [...] opens on the new horizon. The mental focus henceforth is not on the maintaining or refuting of an orthodoxy, but on the genesis and evolution of a capacity, not on perfection, but on process.⁵²

Lawrence's 'mysterious life-suggestion tapping for admission' can be weighed against Harrison's exultant notion of a 'door' opening on 'the new horizon'. For Harrison this 'process' is aligned with a female earth-goddess such as Demeter, not a male divinity. She converts Darwin's interpretation of nature into a courageous levelling of the variables essential to her concept of a male principle: fixed hierarchy, stern competition, a coercive morality, bullish individualism and rarefied spirituality. She constructs Darwin as the key exponent of a primarily physical view of humanity, since any superior mental traits evolved out of the species' physical battle to survive. For Darwin, morality is not an unalterable right and wrong, laid down by religion. Instead, law is based on pressing social needs that are dynamic, volatile and fluid.⁵³ Darwin's evolutionary worldview privileged, according to Harrison, an amoral and collective female potency. Harrison would invoke Aeschylus' *Oresteia* to show that law is a component of the social entity's will to survive and thrive, just as matriarchal 'blood-law' is anchored not in mercy but in condign retributive justice which safeguards family structure, and especially ties to the mother.

Harrison's image of 'the door' opening on a 'new horizon' in 1871 is notable, given that this year also saw Heinrich Schliemann (1822-1890) embark upon excavations at Ithaca to found Troy.⁵⁴ Harrison read into the work of Schliemann unassailable proof that visions can become real and tangible: 'We Hellenists were, in truth, at that time "a people who sat in darkness", but we were soon to see a great light, two great lights – archaeology, anthropology. Classics were turning in their long sleep. [...] I had just left Cambridge when Schliemann began to dig at Troy.'⁵⁵ Hugh Kenner's observation that 'Schliemann had been to Troy, and a cosmos had

⁵² *The Influence of Darwinism on the Study of Religions* reprinted in Jane Ellen Harrison, *Alpha and Omega* (London: Sidgwick, 1925), pp. 143-78.

⁵³ Darwin proposed that whatever assists the group to prosper will eventually be seen as moral conduct: '[i]f, for instance, to take an extreme case, men were reared under precisely the same condition as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters; and no one would think of interfering'. See Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, And Selection in Relation to Sex* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 73.

⁵⁴ Arthur Evans would later embark on excavations at Crete. The artefacts found here suggested that ancient Minoan culture might have been matriarchal. This would mark a crucial turning point in Jane Harrison's intellectual life, for it hinted at a pre-Olympian matriarchy. See Harrison, *Reminiscences*, p. 72. Harrison maintained close scholarly ties for decades with Schliemann's co-worker Wilhelm Dörpfeld (1853-1940).

⁵⁵ Harrison, *Reminiscences*, p. 82.

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altered⁵⁶ may seem intemperate. But the activities of Schliemann and his acolytes at Troy and Mycenae became a source of enormous popular interest; readers relished the florid reports of how ‘the spade brought to light tomb after tomb, and how each tomb yielded its golden hoard’.⁵⁷ In the 1870s, classical archaeologists like Charles Newton secured a professional and ideological niche within the dominant discourse of Hellenism by striving for impeccable standards of scientific methodology while remaining classicists. Pater suggested that a ‘student of *origins* [...] of the earliest stages of art and poetry, must be content to follow faint traces’ (GS, p. 111). Yet these Paterian ‘traces’, or what the doyen of social evolutionary theory Edward Burnett Tylor would designate ‘survivals’ in his 2-volume *Primitive Culture* (1871), were being unearthed and examined with unprecedented flair.⁵⁸

Deflating the myth of the happy Hellene whose religion was, in Harrison’s words, ‘a thing of joyful confidence, a friendly fellowship with the gods’, (PGR, p. 1) in favour of a developmental approach to classical history, Pater promotes a fragmented Greece grappling, as was late-Victorian Britain, with the blessings and curses of its own increasingly shrill and fast-

⁵⁶ Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California, 1971), p. 42.

⁵⁷ Anon., ‘Schliemann’s Mycenae’, *Quarterly Review*, 145 (1878), 68. The modern world’s discovery of ancient civilization through excavation was chronicled extensively in the pages of periodicals such as the middlebrow general interest weekly *The Illustrated London News*. Founded in May 1842, it began publication when Queen Victoria had reigned only five years and it was one of the few general periodicals to consistently report archaeological discoveries as a general practice. It was selling 20 000 copies within six weeks of initial publication and reached a circulation of 250 000 by 1852. See Peter W. Sinnema, *The Dynamics of the Pictured Page: Representing the Nation in the ‘Illustrated London News’, 1842-1892* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

⁵⁸ E. B. Tylor formulated the anthropological doctrine of ‘survivals’ to denote the ‘processes, customs, opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has evolved’. See *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1871), I, pp. 14-15. On Tylor’s coinage of ‘survivals’ as ‘the foundation stone for a school of anthropological folklorists’ see *Peasant Customs and Savage Myths. Selections from the British Folklorists*, ed. by Richard M. Dorson, 2 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), I, p. 181. See also Joan Leopold, *Culture in Comparative and Evolutionary Perspective: E. B. Tylor and the Making of ‘Primitive Culture’* (Berlin: Verlag, 1980), pp. 49-54. On Tylor and the refinement of nineteenth-century anthropology see George W. Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1968); Stocking, *Functionalism Historicized: Essays in British Social Anthropology* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987). Robert Crawford contends that Pater fashioned his use of the term ‘survival’ in addition to his wider anthropological enthusiasms through the mediation of Andrew Lang, who during his residence in Oxford in the early 1870s was a younger friend of Pater’s; see ‘Pater’s Renaissance, Andrew Lang, and Anthropological Romanticism’, *ELH*, 53 (1986), 849-79.

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paced modernity.⁵⁹ Archaeology, anthropology and psychology had fused to reappraise unalterably the British sense of what Hellenism signified, including its sense of a woman's social and religious function in ancient Greece.⁶⁰ Swiss historian J. J. Bachofen argued in the 1860s that the earliest form of social structure was both matriarchal and matrilineal, a notion that offered little solace to the social and moral verities of the British elite who discussed a sublimely content and child-like Greek.⁶¹ This ideology of stability and permanent value chafed against Charles Newton's 'archaeological' view that furnished material evidence of profound variation, and thus, a compelling rival system for interpreting the Greeks and their mythological heritage.

The ominous atavistic potencies that Lawrence explicitly links with 'Demeter, Persephone, and the halls of Dis', were also addressed in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, which appeared in 1872. Harrison (whose *Prolegomena* posits that the Olympian gods overthrew an older matriarchal cult and overlaid Dionysian ecstasies with Apollonian reason) believed no artist, philologist or archaeologist could scrutinise Greek drama or myth in the same way after Nietzsche's illustration of the turbulent 'Dionysian' side of Greek religion. In 1909 she called *The Birth of Tragedy* 'real genius',⁶² and in her opinion, the rites of purification belonging to the lower stratum, 'repulsive as they often are, [...] furnished ultimately the material out of which "mysteries" were made – mysteries which, [...] when informed by the new spirit of the religions of Dionysos [...] lent to Greece its deepest and most enduring religious impulse' (*PGR*, p. 29). Harrison followed Nietzsche in imagining a kind of 'Dionysian' merging with others as a still desirable

⁵⁹ See Shawn Malley, 'Disturbing Hellenism: Walter Pater, Charles Newton, and the Myth of Demeter and Persephone', in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Lesley Williams, and Carolyn Williams, pp. 90-106. Malley explores Pater's deployment of two versions of archaeology, a vertical evolutionary view that constructs and affirms Hellenic origins in a mastering genealogical narrative, and an archaeological view that situates and isolates aesthetics within specific cultural contexts. Both views ultimately represent Pater's desire for continuity and identification with antiquity, but from different perspectives.

⁶⁰ Archaeological evidence uncovered in the 1880s and 1890s by Dörpfeld at Athens demonstrated that thousands of years of Greek culture had in fact preceded Periclean Athens. Dörpfeld's discoveries led Jane Harrison to write her 1890 *Myths and Monuments of Athens*, the 'first book of the Cambridge Ritualists' according to Robert Ackerman, 'Jane Ellen Harrison: The Early Work', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 13 (1972), 209-30.

⁶¹ Bachofen was ridiculed by the scientific community for insisting that myth was 'a manifestation of primordial thinking, an immediate historical revelation, and consequently a highly reliable historical source'. See *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen*, trans. by Ralph Manheim with preface by George Boas and intro. by Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 73.

⁶² Quoted in K. J. Phillips, 'Jane Harrison and Modernism', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 17 (1991), 466.

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occasional goal, an escape from crippling inhibition, rather than a stage of totemism to be discarded forever.⁶³ For Pater, writing in the mid-1870s, the physical remains of Demeter and Persephone personified the Greeks' 'deepest thoughts concerning the conditions of [their] physical existence and spiritual life, maintained their hold through many changes, and are still not without their solemnising power even for the modern mind' (GS, p. 151). Pater did not shrink from the fact that the 'solemnising power' included intimations of savage mysticism and violent disorder, even the orgiastic irrationality of a bacchanal.

One of Nietzsche's most provocative arguments was directed against the ideality of Olympian religion and the entrenched classical tradition perpetuating Arnold's fiction of Hellas as a chaste, static harmony rather than as a historical ferment. F. W. Robertson received a stern rebuke from Arnold for belittling the noble simplicity and serene greatness of Greek culture; but Robertson's stringent analysis of Hellenic myth foreshadows a key component of Nietzsche's theory by some twenty years:

This bright world was all. Its revels – its dances – its theatrical exhibitions – [...] these were blessedness; and the Greek's hell was death. Their poets speak pathetically of the misery of the wrench from all that is dear and bright. The dreadfulness of death is one of the most remarkable things [...] in those ancient writings.⁶⁴

Harrison's high estimation of the Nietzschean perspective is perhaps unsurprising given that through her own analyses of specific festivals and cults, Olympian religion is everywhere perched precariously upon an older, precedent stratum of worship involving 'snakes and ghosts and underworld beings' (PGR, p. 28).⁶⁵ For Nietzsche the entire Greek world was much more sinister than earlier Hellenists had ever conceived: 'This mode of access to Antiquity [the Dionysian] is best left buried under rubble [...] It seems that the Greek world is a hundred times more concealed and alien than scholars of today in their brash manner would have it'.⁶⁶ For Nietzsche the Dionysian

⁶³ See Patrick Bridgwater, *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony: A Study of Nietzsche's Impact on English and American Literature* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972), p. 70.

⁶⁴ F. W. Robertson, *Sermons on Christian Doctrine* (1906), p. 287.

⁶⁵ Harrison opens the *Prolegomena* with a frontal attack on Olympian bastions, considering the Diasia, a festival in honour of Zeus – not Zeus in his Homeric splendour, however, but Zeus Meilichios ('easy-to-be-entreated') – 'figured by his worshippers as a snake' (p. 18). This god is 'Zeus in his underworld aspect – Zeus-Hades', the 'male double of Erinys [the Fury]' (pp. 17, 23). The dual character of the chief of the Olympians suggests that each of the major Olympian cults has concealed chthonic roots. In this light Harrison considers some of the major festivals of the Attic calendar, notably the Attic feasts of Demeter, with the intent of illustrating an older stratum of ritual practice not entirely subsumed by the newer cults.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Anthony Stephens, 'Socrates or chorus person? The Problem of Individuality in Nietzsche's Hellenism', in *Rediscovering Hellenism*, ed. Clarke, p. 240.

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Greek was no sober rationalist devoted to the soothing symmetries of logic, but deeply ‘intoxicated’ by religion, in its earliest form comprised of ‘festivals centred in extravagant sexual licentiousness’, a ‘horrible mixture of sensuality and cruelty which has always seemed to me to be the real “witches’ brew”’.⁶⁷

Nietzsche’s designation of ancient festivals as a ‘witches’ brew’, an irrational aspect largely elided in Arnold’s Hellenism, was prescient, given that archaeological digs in the 1870s would slowly establish the primacy of matriarchal goddesses like Demeter and Persephone behind Dionysian fertility cults. Though ‘nature for the first time attains her artistic jubilee’ in the ‘Dionysian orgies of the Greeks’, there was little room for imperious goddess-heroines in Nietzsche’s conception of Hellas, given that both Apollonian and Dionysian principles were overshadowed by male archetypes. It is in Harrison’s later inquiries that the Great Mother is elevated as prior to masculine divinities, that even Dionysus was a later cult merged with earlier mysteries and rituals dominated by goddess-worship.

While Jane Harrison welcomed the nascent sciences of humankind as a ‘new horizon’, offering fresh perspectives on previously unacknowledged facets of matriarchal religion, John Ruskin responded with a radical ambivalence towards recent developments in mythography and anthropology. In 1876 Ruskin was sufficiently struck by E. B. Tylor’s *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (1865) to call it a book of ‘rare value’, despite his strong disagreement with its methodology,⁶⁸ which assessed the Persephone myth as necessarily savage and crude in relation to civilised society. Ruskin stated with disarming confidence that myth might conceal a spiritual resonance beneath the framework of a marvellous story, a meaning far from debased, thus educating and edifying modern audiences.

To Ruskin, Tylor’s intimidating expertise – imbued by the practitioners of classical archaeology contending for professional prestige within and without the academy – was no guarantee of access to the complex of truths on which the Demeter-Persephone myth rests. Given that classical archaeology was constituted within Hellenic studies as primarily a practice of data acquisition and judicious management of collections, it could not, in Ruskin’s opinion, fully grasp the abstruse dynamics of the myth. As Ian Morris observes, the ‘problem with Hellenist archaeology is not its commendable level of detail,

⁶⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871), trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), pp. 33, 39. On Nietzsche’s rejection of ‘all attempts to see in the Greeks beautiful souls, golden means or other types of perfection’ see Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *Blood for the Ghosts: Classical Influences in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Duckworth, 1982), p. 180.

⁶⁸ Ruskin, *Complete Works*, XXVIII, p. 614.

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but the idea that in archaeology mastery of a vast body of artefacts is *all* there is [...] In the late nineteenth century archaeologists of Greece decided that the compiler and classifier of excavational data in a multi-volume site report was the ideal creative persona'.⁶⁹ But by focusing on non-narrative forms, archaeologists like Charles Newton inhibited their own capacity to elaborate the story of the relationship between ancient Greece and the West, which was for Ruskin a far more worthwhile pursuit.⁷⁰

Though sympathetic to Tylor's arguments, Ruskin averred that man's experience of the natural world was the true foundation upon which the Persephone myth rests. The intended function of this story, Ruskin suggested, was to establish and demonstrate an order of truth far beyond the limited authority of any individual insight conveyed through the coolly dispassionate prose of Charles Newton's *History of Discoveries* or Tylor's comparative anthropology. Ruskin knew Tylor's brother, the geologist Alfred Tylor (1824-1884), and this might have led to his scrutiny of Edward Burnett's *Researches*. Though E. B. Tylor was, like his brother, a rationalist, he did not deny the vital role of poetic intuition in comprehending Persephone: '[f]ully to understand an old-world myth needs not evidence and argument alone' but also 'deep poetic feeling'.⁷¹

John Addington Symonds, in *Studies of the Greek Poets* (1873-76), pushed the point further by calling myth a unique art-form, '[t]he raw material of silk may interest the merchant or the man of science; the artist cares for the manufactured fabric, with its curious patterns and refulgent hues'.⁷² Symonds and Ruskin argue that the Persephone myth, as it appears in great literature, is an occult expressive mode that registers unseen correspondences – a mode suited to the experimental artist. Winckelmann had viewed the first founders of Greek religion as 'poets'.⁷³ For Pater, the grammar of myth is one of mystical clairvoyance, purification and fleeting ecstatic illumination, distilling myriad experiences in an instant of vision. The mysteries of these displaced earth deities are discerned perhaps best by the maverick artist-hierophant, who prepares for them through stoical self-suppression and unswerving commitment to the arcane rites of craft.

⁶⁹ Ian Morris, *Classical Greece: Ancient Histories and Modern Archaeologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 27.

⁷⁰ Since archaeology by its very nature shaped its practices outside of the environmental controls of the universities, it posed a potentially serious threat to textual Greece. Yet institutionally subordinate to classical philology, intellectually allied with the iconographic and aesthetic conventions of art history, and hermeneutically isolated from non-text based classification schemes in prehistoric archaeology, the threat of an artifactual Greece was nullified.

⁷¹ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, I, p. 276.

⁷² John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 2nd series (London, 1876), p. 6.

⁷³ Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art*, p. 66.

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If Ruskin chose to dwell on more ethereal and invigorating aspects of Greek religion, it is also apparent that the strength he drew from its mythology was inextricably connected with the chthonic shades that Lawrence depicts encroaching upon the spotless Victorian 'compound' illumined with sweetness and 'electric light'. In an 1861 lecture on 'Tree Twigs', Ruskin spoke of the Greeks' passionate attachment to flowers:

There is no Greek goddess corresponding to the Flora of the Romans. Their Flora is Persephone, "the bringer of death." She plays for a little while in the Sicilian fields, gathering flowers, then snatched away by Pluto, receives her chief power as she vanishes from our sight, and is crowned in the grave.⁷⁴

Ruskin's *Proserpina*, whose cadences have more of an archaic Greek timbre than many of the period's orotund translations, closed the gap between nature myth and stringent botanical enquiry, seeing plants in human terms. Indeed, mythical reference fuses with vivid personal memory in his elegiac title, *Proserpina: Studies of Wayside Flowers, while the air was yet pure among the Alps, and in the Scotland and England which my Father knew*. Though Ruskin relished the elaborate floral connotations of the mythic narrative, he also addressed Persephone's kinship with the ineffable mystery of mortality; as did Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who began his brooding portrait of Jane Morris holding the pomegranate in 1872 and toiled with turbid luxuriance on successive versions of the picture *Proserpina* until his own death ten years later.

Ruskin revisits the Greek concept of death, with which his Persephone is associated, in *The Queen of the Air* (1866-1869): 'Proserpina plays in the fields of Sicily, and thence is torn away into darkness, and becomes the Queen of Fate – not merely of death, but of the gloom which closes over and ends, not beauty only, but sin'.⁷⁵ Ruskin's sense of the 'truth' inherent in the myth's 'underworld tone' was not literal but anchored in its moral implications, for the acute feeling of religious awe it conveyed.⁷⁶ In *The Queen of the Air*, Greek mythology emits altogether more sinister energies as a sometimes degraded and wilfully misguided religion, 'I could get, and do get, some help out of Greek myths – but they are full of earth, and horror, in

⁷⁴ Ruskin, *Complete Works*, VII, p. 478.

⁷⁵ Ruskin, *Complete Works*, XIX, p. 304. See also Dinah Birch, *Ruskin's Myths* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, *Ruskin's Mythic Queen: Gender Subversion in Victorian Culture* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998).

⁷⁶ To Jane Harrison, 'The Greeks were less anxious than either [E]asterns and moderns to point a moral; their praise or blame is, as we so often see, adapted to an ethical standard which is aesthetic rather than judicial.' See Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey in Art and Literature* (London: Rivingtons, 1882), p. 88.

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spite of their beauty. Persephone is the sum of them'.⁷⁷ Thus he wrote to Charles Eliot Norton in a mood of deep depression and nagging uncertainty. Elizabeth Barrett Browning also seizes upon the violent intimations of the myth in *Aurora Leigh* by adapting Persephone in its treatment of the raped Marian Erle.⁷⁸ This tone is close to Ruskin's mordant seriousness, arguing that the dearth of comforting belief in eternal reward in Greek mythology generally, and Demeter-Persephone in particular, is the most fundamental feature distinguishing it from the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Ruskin's conception of the Persephone myth as 'full of earth' and 'horror' reflects in part the existential weariness and loss of Evangelical faith typifying his later years. Yet his humanistic accent on the religious intensity of Greek myth, appraising Greek handicrafts with graceful precision and delicacy, positing Greek coins as a correct reflection of Greek art, hailing sculpture as more instructive than Greek literary artefacts – all this anticipates Walter Pater's materialist account of Demeter-Persephone in the 1870s. Ruskin's notion in *The Queen of the Air* that 'the highest phase in the human pottery [...] differs from common china-ware, primarily, by a measurable degree of heat' evolves into Pater's concept of man as an 'old earthy creature', 'moulded' from and slipping back into the soil as 'perishing human clay'.⁷⁹ Ruskin's regard for the poignant commonness of the urns and utensils salvaged from the rubble at sites such as Pompeii and Vilci becomes in Pater's scheme sympathy for the broken vessel of man who both emerges from and returns to Demeter's earth.⁸⁰ Pater responded to Ruskin's argument that Demeter was not only the presiding deity over this earthly element, but the means by which myths such as hers could be rehabilitated for the restive late-Victorian imagination.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ruskin, *Complete Works*, XXXVI, p. 501.

⁷⁸ See Susan Gubar, 'Mother, Maiden and the Marriage of Death: Women Writers and an Ancient Myth', *Women's Studies*, 6 (1979), 301-15.

⁷⁹ Ruskin, 'Lecture II: Athena Keramitis', *The Queen of the Air*, in *Complete Works*, XIX, p. 355; Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, 2 vols (1885; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1910), II, p. 223; Pater, 'Emerald Uthwart' (1892), in *Miscellaneous Studies* (1895; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 220.

⁸⁰ Ruskin and Pater's sensitivity towards the circumstances of quotidian life in classical times finds an equivalent in the vivid 'recreations' of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) and Wilhelm Adolph Becker's quasi-fictional meditations on Greece (*Charicles: A Tale Illustrative of Private Life Among the Ancient Greeks* [1845]) and Rome (*Gallus, or Roman Scenes of the Time of Augustus* [1844]).

⁸¹ Raymond Fitch persuasively argues that the discoveries of the mythologists 'might be remythologized, their comparatively dry discoveries orchestrated into new myths for modern admonition'. See *The Poison Sky: Myth and Apocalypse in Ruskin* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), p. 549.

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V

Whereas Ruskin deprecated a strictly anthropological approach to Demeter-Persephone, Pater's *Greek Studies* cannily crosses and blurs disciplinary boundaries, using a hybrid narrative form that fuses the 'elegant materialism'⁸² of his modified familiar essay with hypotheses from nascent sciences of humankind. His approach to the 'old Greek gods' was, according to Robert Crawford, that of 'an imaginative anthropologist',⁸³ exploiting the models of art history and classicism while potentially subverting the cultural legitimacy of both. Lewis Farnell even lauded Pater as 'the father of archaeological teaching at Oxford',⁸⁴ given the series of lectures on archaic Greek art he offered in 1878. Pater's intellectual enterprise was to reappraise Greece both as a vibrant thought-adventure and as a tangible archaeological project facilitated by Newton's sedulous excavations at Cnidus, always venerating the sensuous contours of quotidian human life.⁸⁵

Greek Studies benefits from what Pater calls, '[c]enturies of zealous archaeology' as well as from other modes of historical scholarship (GS, p. 152).⁸⁶ However, because Greek art survives only in suggestive splinters and shards, it is, according to Pater, necessary for us 'in a somewhat visionary manner, to fill up empty spaces, and more or less make substitution' (GS, p. 205). The still-visible wheel-ruts detected by Schliemann within the gateway at Mycenae Pater reconnects with Homer's account of metal war-chariots so that we 'may see in fancy the whole grandiose character of the place, as it may really have been' (GS, p. 207).⁸⁷ Pater's visionary lyricism creates an elastic version of Hellenism that while emphasising cultural origins with

⁸² Thus Margaret Oliphant's response to Pater's writing in her review 'New Books: Pater's *History of the Renaissance*', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 114 (November 1873), 608. Oliphant, despite her suspicion of Pater's writings, remains one of the most trenchant early commentators on the 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* which illustrated: 'what Greek – not the language but the tone of mind and condition of thought, taken up a thousand years or so too late, on the top of a long heritage of other thoughts and conditions – may bring Oxford to' (p. 607).

⁸³ Crawford, 'Pater's *Renaissance*', p. 849. See Pater, 'On Wordsworth', p. 458.

⁸⁴ Lewis Farnell, *An Oxonian Looks Back* (London: Hopkinson, 1934), p. 77.

⁸⁵ In Pater's earliest published essay is an insistence on the 'moral world [...] ever in contact with the physical', which is borne out by the excavated 'remains' of ancient Greece. See [Walter Pater], 'Coleridge's Writings', *Westminster Review*, n.s., 29 (1866), 107.

⁸⁶ See also Linda Dowling, 'Walter Pater and Archaeology: The Reconciliation with Earth', *Victorian Studies*, 31 (1988), 209-31.

⁸⁷ Pater's interest in archaeologists and archaeologically inclined travellers is apparent from his readings, which included works by Heroditus, Thomas Wyse, William Martin Leake, Louis Palma di Cesnola, Heinrich Schliemann, Arthur Young, and Reginald Heber. See Inman, *Walter Pater's Reading: A Bibliography of his Library Borrowings and Literary References, 1858-1873* (New York: Garland, 1981) and *Walter Pater and His Reading, 1874-1877, with a Bibliography of his Library Borrowings and Literary References 1878-94* (New York: Garland, 1990).

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Greece, also registers contradiction and convulsion within Greek culture itself.

By 1874, when Pater had published his study of William Wordsworth, his appreciation of the dynamics of ‘culture’ and its link to primitive matriarchal religion bears an inimitable Tylorian imprint. Discussing Wordsworth’s sense of soul infusing inanimate objects, Pater remarks:

[i]t was like a “survival” in him of that primitive condition, which some philosophers have traced in the history of human culture, in which all outward objects alike, even the works of men’s hands, were believed to be endowed with life and animation, and the world was full of souls; that mood in which the old Greek gods were first begotten, and which had many strange aftergrowths.⁸⁸

Pater’s curiosity about archaeology and comparative mythography implies an aspiration to one of Wordsworth’s most deeply held beliefs: ‘to follow the steps of the man of science’, ‘carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself’.⁸⁹ Pater’s, like Ruskin’s, is ‘no simple Hellenism’,⁹⁰ and both commentators become increasingly absorbed by the more ‘clouded’ components of Demeter-Persephone; how the tale speaks with a note of refined, complex melancholy to an era of seismic social, political and aesthetic upheaval.⁹¹ Pater reflects in his essay on Winckelmann, first published in the *Westminster Review* in 1867, that

Cardinal Newman speaks of the ‘classical polytheism which was gay and graceful, as was natural in a civilised age’. Yet such a view is only a partial one. In it the eye is fixed on the sharp bright edge of the high Hellenic culture, but loses sight of the sombre world across which it strikes.⁹²

Pater reacts to the ‘sombre’ images and associations that cluster especially around the grieving mother of Demeter, and the sanctuary at Cnidus reveals the ‘graves of that old [chthonic] religion’ with ‘much still fresh in [them]’ (GS, p. 142). The freshness for the modern imagination resides primarily in its statuary uncovered by Charles Newton.

⁸⁸ Pater, ‘On Wordsworth’, p. 458.

⁸⁹ William Wordsworth, ‘Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1850)’, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), I, p. 141.

⁹⁰ Dowling, ‘Walter Pater and Archaeology’, p. 210.

⁹¹ Richard Jenkyns illustrates how the Victorian Hellenism to which *The Renaissance, Greek Studies*, and *Plato and Platonism* (1893) belongs is a negotiation on the part of the Victorians with a more venerable civilisation, a negotiation that is ultimately more projection than response. See *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).

⁹² Pater, ‘Winckelmann’ (1867) in *The Works of Walter Pater*, 10 vols (London, 1910), I, p. 200.

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Pater's *Greek Studies* is a deeply pondered riposte to the lectures on Hellenic myth and sculpture that Ruskin formulates in *The Queen of the Air* and *Aratra Pentilici* (delivered at Oxford in 1870, published 1872).⁹³ Pater selects Demeter-Persephone as a centrepiece for his *Greek Studies* because it is pre-eminently a myth detailing transactions with the tangible earth as the actual medium of biological and cultural regeneration: 'all [...] that related to the earth in its changes, the growth and decay of all things born of it – was covered by the story of Demeter, the myth of the earth as a mother' (GS, p. 89). For Pater the myth is pre-Christian, but also part of a pre-Homeric, chthonic cult of Greece's Pelasgian inhabitants, their first faltering conciliatory gestures towards a most ancient deity of the earth.

Pater's essay on 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone' was first presented as two lectures in Birmingham in November 1875 then published as a two-part essay in the *Fortnightly Review* (1876). Pater's obsession with the mythic narrative impelled him to cultivate an unusually personal, confiding tone in the original periodical version of the lecture that does not survive into the account finally collected in the posthumous volume of *Greek Studies*.⁹⁴

There is an attractiveness in these goddesses of the earth akin to the influence of cool places, quiet houses, subdued light, tranquillising voices; for me, at least, I know it has been good to be with Demeter and Persephone, all the time I have been reading and thinking of them; and all through this essay, I have been asking myself, what is there in this phase of ancient religion for us at the present day?⁹⁵

These warmly affectionate and laidback cadences, making the original precincts of the Cnidian Demeter almost companionable, imply on a cursory inspection that Pater's Hellenism is not so far removed from the radiant Arnoldian attitude. Here Pater's hushed reverence for the Cnidian Demeter seems to ape a modern mode of worship, the Victorian idealisation of the hearth and its ministering angel, the staunch and dutiful housewife.⁹⁶ But

⁹³ Pater found much to brood over in Ruskin's contention that '[s]culpture, it thus appears, is the only work of wisdom that the Greeks care to speak of; they think it involves and crowns every other [...] as queenliest of the arts'. See Ruskin, 'Lecture III: Imagination', *Aratra Pentilici*, in *Complete Works*, XX, p. 263.

⁹⁴ Pater revised the *Fortnightly Review* version of the essay in 1878, apparently with a view to publishing it, according to Arthur Symons, as part of a larger collection of essays on Greek myth, thought, and sculpture to be entitled *Studies in Greek Remains* (Arthur Symons, 'Walter Pater', *Figures of Several Centuries* [London: Constable, 1916], p. 331n.). In the event, the volume assembled after Pater's death by his literary executor, C. L. Shadwell, which Shadwell entitled *Greek Studies*, was much more diverse in scope, including as it did the imaginary portrait 'Hippolytus Veiled'.

⁹⁵ Pater, 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone', p. 276.

⁹⁶ This is reinforced, as Shawn Malley argues, by George Kilburne's 1880 watercolour 'commemorating the transfer in that year of Newton's artefacts from the storage sheds to the new

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Pater's essay concentrates with an intensity equal to that found in Swinburne's 'Proserpine' lyrics as to how the precise terms of the myth become relevant to, and eloquent about, the exigencies of contemporary experience.

Pater contends that by pursuing the Demeter-Persephone myth 'we come across various phases of Greek culture, which are not without their likenesses in the modern mind' (GS, p. 81). Pater's evolutionary aesthetic model of the myth is key, drawing from 'a stock of poetical impressions' (GS, p. 82) to which the archaeologist, art historian, and mythographer actively contribute. He sets out three successive phases in the elaboration of the narrative, each corresponding to an artistic treatment of its religious sentiments and to a specific phase of cultural expansion. Following Ruskin's schematisation in *The Queen of the Air*, he avers that myths evolve from an early 'half-conscious, instinctive, or mystical, phase' of unwritten legend, signalling 'certain primitive impressions of the phenomena of the natural world'; this mystic apprehension emerges from a life subsisted in intimate physical communion with the closed and silent earth, that is both nurturing womb and imprisoning tomb, 'in its sorrow and its promise, its darkness and its helpfulness to man' (GS, p. 91). The second, the conscious or literary, phase shows poets such as the author(s) of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* utilising 'the vague instinctive product of the popular imagination [...] with a purely literary interest'. In the third, or 'ethical' phase, persons and events of the narrative 'are realised as abstract symbols, because intensely characteristic examples, of moral or spiritual conditions' (GS, p. 91). Following the evolution of the myth, the mystical provenance of the chthonic deities is ultimately spatialised into human shape as statuary.

Within this tripartite scheme, Pater is not satisfied merely to validate materially the details of the narrative of Persephone's rape and return from the infernal region. He incorporates the element of mutability into the imaginative fabric of the myth, so that readers can discern how the apparently sanguine Greeks became increasingly nonplussed and destabilised by the sense of their own being in history, what Harrison would later link with the

Mausoleum Room. The image illustrates this sublimation of Greek ritual to Victorian genre by dramatising the humanising motive of Greek sculpture within Demeter and Persephone's new "home" – the British Museum. Motherhood is the real subject of the painting. The Victorian mother and daughter invest the sculptural group with the symbolic meaning Pater communicates through archaeology. The mother, in a protective and instructive attitude, turns the daughter's attention away from the stolid architectural forms and virile lions excavated at Halicarnassus towards the quietly dignified arrangement of Demeter and Persephone. Cultural continuity over vast reaches of time is established in the material immediacy of the galleries and in the affection between a mother and daughter. The sculpture gallery, like the temple at Cnidus itself, is now a place for winsome and nostalgic home-thoughts.' See Malley, 'Disturbing Hellenism', p. 105.

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‘chilly gloom’ in chthonic ceremonial (PGR, p. 28). Pater refers to the role of change itself as the cornerstone of culture:

[f]rom the vague and fluctuating union, in which together [Demeter and Persephone] had represented the earth and its changes, the mother and the daughter define themselves with special functions, and with fixed, well-understood relationships, the incidents and emotions of which soon weave themselves into a pathetic story. (GS, p. 92)

The fluctuations of the earth from which the primitive mind began to form Demeter and Persephone is, by the fifth century BC, a compelling historical narrative, a ‘pathetic story’. Recovery and resonance for the modern imagination relies upon forms of modern identification, the separation of Demeter’s role as agricultural deity into her ‘special functions’ and domestic travails as an actual mother. Fashioned initially from an aesthetic response to seasonal shifts, Pater explains that over time the Greeks translated the unavoidable features of mutability and decay into a transcendental image of a mother and daughter.

The culture that produced and read this ‘myth’ is, Pater indicates, one marked by, and unashamedly proud of, duality. The Greeks, he tells us, believed that their history stretched with ‘unbroken continuity’ back to a mythical past ‘in the very places where their later life was lived’, and thus a ‘network of story and imagery’ spread to ‘almost every place in Greece’ (GS, pp. 33, 100-101). For Pater the dual goddess of Demeter-Persephone is connected with both light and shade. The traditional sign of the grieving Demeter is her ‘robe of dark blue [...] the blue robe of the earth in shadow’ (GS, p. 116). In *Marius the Epicurean*, Marius’s mother is depicted as ‘languid and shadowy’ in her pious and wistful worship of the dead, suggesting the duality of the great goddess, an image of the *mater dolorosa* but also the deity at the threshold of the underworld.⁹⁷ However much Pater may strive to domesticate and personalise the eerie death-goddess Persephone, even to the point of using terms and cadences evoking the Mona Lisa in *The Renaissance*,⁹⁸ she is still for him ambiguous and unsettling,

⁹⁷ Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, I, 17. The quiet house, ‘cloistral or monastic’, is a Demetrian vessel, ‘a *sacellum*, the peculiar sanctuary of his mother’ (I, 20). Marius comes to associate religious awe and sorrow with the mother’s presence: ‘And Marius [...] even thus early, came to think of women’s tears, of women’s hands to lay one to rest, in death as in the sleep of childhood, as a sort of natural want. The soft lines of the white hands and face, set among the many folds of the veil and stole of the Roman widow, [...] defined themselves for him as the typical expression of maternity’ (I, 21). The ‘white hands and face’ of the mother here echo Pater’s earlier description of a statue of Demeter in the sanctuary at Eleusis, ‘with face and hands of ivory’, in ‘likeness to women’s flesh’ (GS, pp. 142-3).

⁹⁸ Where Mona Lisa ‘has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her’ (‘Leonardo da Vinci’, p. 99), now Persephone ‘in the garden of Aidoneus has eaten the

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hinting at the freshness of new life in its intrinsic and anguished proximity to decomposition. His Persephone is sublime, grave, and chaste, embodying change, yet beyond change herself.

She is compact of sleep, and death, and flowers, but of narcotic flowers especially, – a *revenant*, who in the garden of Aidoneus has eaten of the pomegranate, and bears always the secret of decay in her, of return to the grave, in the mystery of those swallowed seeds; sometimes, in later work, holding in her hand the key of the great prison-house, but which unlocks all secrets also; [...] sometimes, like Demeter, the poppy. [...] Her shadowy eyes have gazed upon the fainter colouring of the under-world, and the tranquillity, born of it, has ‘passed into her face’. (GS, pp. 148–49)

This lady as sumptuous, almost bodiless deity, touching both arcane, trancelike awareness and oblivion, evokes the impassive, twilight Proserpine of Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads*. Pater intimates the inscrutable presence of Swinburne’s death-goddess, yet adroitly sidesteps what he considered Swinburne’s belligerent antitheism. Pater’s Persephone is not merely a deeply disquieting end toward which all things draw, but an ineffable presence containing a promise; her mysteries include not only ‘the secret of decay’ but ‘all secrets’ perhaps even that of resurrection – the ‘promise of life to come’ implicit in the ecstatic reunion of mother and daughter (GS, p. 93). This may explain why motifs of disinterred vestiges of forgotten cultures, opened graves and radiant cadavers are so prominent in *Greek Studies* as affecting metaphors of material transfiguration, ‘the very spirit of life itself’ working incessantly to fashion ‘soul and body out of the lime and clay of the earth’.⁹⁹ Pater elaborates these associations in a late essay, ‘Hippolytus Veiled’ (1889), an imaginary portrait based on a lost version of Euripides’s *Hippolytus*. He presents in Hippolytus his most complete illustration of the virgin, with ‘immaculate body and soul’ (GS, p. 175), in relation to the virgin mother. Through his Amazon mother the young Hippolytus comes to worship the goddess Artemis, whose shrine is near their home off a road to Eleusis. In a moment of personal revelation, Hippolytus realises that this Artemis is really Demeter’s child, the intact Persephone. In Eleusinian worship

pomegranate’, and bears always the secret of decay in her. Mona Lisa’s ‘beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed’ (‘Leonardo da Vinci’, p. 98) is reminiscent of the depiction of Demeter.

⁹⁹ Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, Chapter 22, p. 231. See also the ‘beautiful corpse’ image that features in Pater’s late imaginary portrait, ‘Emerald Uthwart’. J. A. Symonds remarked in 1895: ‘Pater wrote me a very sympathetic letter about my [...] poem on the “Corpse of Julia.” It pleased me’. See *The Letters of John Addington Symonds*, eds. Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters, 3 vols (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1969), II, p. 338. Symonds’s poem treated the famous 16th-century episode of the accidental uncovering of the still-lovely corpse of Emperor Claudius’s daughter Julia as a parable: ‘Thus Hellas from the gloom, / Radiant with beauty’s immortality, / Shone forth and bade the soul of man be free’. See J. A. Symonds, ‘The Corpse of Julia’, in *Many Moods: A Volume of Verse* (London: Smith, Elder, 1878), p. 30.

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Hippolytus merges in the figure of Artemis traits of the dual goddess, stressing her benign maternal comfort and generous protectiveness:

[T]he goddess reveals herself to the lad, [...] at once a virgin, necessarily therefore the creature of solitude, yet also the assiduous nurse of children, and patroness of the young. Her friendly intervention at the act of birth everywhere, her claim upon the nursling, among tame and wild creatures equally, among men as among gods, nay! among the stars [...] gave her a breadth of influence seemingly co-extensive with the sum of things. Yes! his great mother was in touch with everything (GS, p. 174).¹⁰⁰

When Pater was drafting his 1876 essay on Demeter and Persephone, his analysis of Greek myth was misconstrued as a provocatively contentious reaction to the triumph of empirical science as well as an audacious debunking of the central tenets of established religion. Pater intuited to what extent the goddess Persephone appealed to those who, like Swinburne, interrogated both modern rationalism and the traditions of orthodox faith, thus contributing to the myth's reputation as intellectual terrain ripe for charismatic iconoclasts in the late-Victorian period. It is hardly surprising then that Pater's re-inventions of myth for his own age deal explicitly and implicitly with the ingenious art of interpretation: not only do they finesse an idiosyncratic reading of the modern temper but they gleefully deconstruct the 'myth' of interpretation itself, thus precluding the possibility of a project such as Arnold's, which strives to attach a consistent, identifiable and magisterial meaning to Demeter-Persephone. Moreover, Pater's treatment of the baleful demonic potencies in Dionysian rites – its frenzies and blood-lusts – conveys his fascination with the Greek ability to embrace 'certain shadowy places' of contamination and foreboding in life, at least in the context of mythic narrative.¹⁰¹

The extent to which Dionysus, like Demeter, is typified by Pater as a dual god, connoting 'a certain darker side' of nature, implies his sense of ancient myth as a conciliatory language; it holds in equipoise the complex polarities and contraries of human experience, oscillating between metaphysical and mortal, untrammelled amplification and sage restraint. Myth for Pater

¹⁰⁰ Just over a decade after Pater's account of the 'great mother' in 'Hippolytus Veiled', a startling new vista would open out in the understanding of Hellenism, according to Jane Harrison's *Reminiscences*: 'Somewhere about the turn of the century there had come to light in the palace of Cnossos a clay sealing which was a veritable little manual of primitive Cretan faith and ritual. I shall never forget the moment when Mr. Arthur Evans first showed it to me. It seemed too good to be true. It represented the Great Mother standing on her own mountain with her attendant lions, and before her a worshipper in ecstasy. [...] Here we have embodied the magical rite of the Mother and the Son, the induction of the Year-Spirit who long preceded the worship of the Father.' See Harrison, *Reminiscences of a Student's Life*, pp. 71-72.

¹⁰¹ See William F. Shuter, *Rereading Walter Pater* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 26-27.

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embraces these two seemingly irreconcilable perspectives: beneath the definite, tangible and sensuous form lingers still that 'restless idealism, inward vision'. And the insights thus divulged remain dream-like, teasing and inchoate; as a reading of a community's sense of itself, Demeter-Persephone will be continually reassembled to keep pace with, and to chart, evolving cultural ambitions and longings.

Pater's responsiveness to the 'darker' components of Persephone affects a narrative strand in late-Victorian poetry that translates the myth increasingly into what Adrienne Rich would term a century later as 'the essential female tragedy':

The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy. We acknowledge Lear (father-daughter split), Hamlet (son and mother) and Oedipus (son and mother) as great embodiments of the human tragedy: but there is no presently enduring recognition of the mother-daughter passion and rapture.

There was such a recognition, but we lost it. It was expressed in the religious mystery of Eleusis, which constituted the spiritual foundation of Greek life for two thousand years. [...] The separation of Demeter and Kore is an unwilling one, it is neither a question of the daughter's rebellion against the mother, nor the mother's rejection of the daughter [...] Each daughter, even in the millennia before Christ, must have longed for a mother whose love for her and whose power were so great as to undo rape and bring her back from death. And every mother must have longed for the power of Demeter, the efficacy of her anger, the reconciliation with her lost self.¹⁰²

For Alfred Lord Tennyson 'the mother-daughter passion and rapture' is fundamental, focusing specifically on the mourning and rage of Demeter, following her path of resolution and reconciliation with Persephone, through initiation into her Mysteries, and participation in her ability to confront the forces of mortality and transfigure them.¹⁰³ But for female poets, the 'religious mystery' often conveys a sharp sense of physical and emotional trauma – to not know where one is heading, to recover and rely upon neglected parts of the self, waiting like a seed for a new unfolding that may never be attained.¹⁰⁴ One of the most seminal representations is Swinburne's 'fatal' figure of the daughter goddess in the poems 'Hymn to Proserpine', 'The Garden of Proserpine', 'At Eleusis' and 'Hesperia', all published in the

¹⁰² Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York, 1976), pp. 237-40. See Karin Voth Harman, 'Immortality and Morality in Contemporary Reworkings of the Demeter/Persephone Myth', in *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's 'Of Woman Born'*, ed. by Andrea O'Reilly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); G. B. Stewart, 'Mother, Daughter, and the Birth of the Female Artist', *Women's Studies*, 6 (1979), 127-145.

¹⁰³ See Helen Luke, 'Mother and Daughter Mysteries', in *The Long Journey Home*, ed. by Christine Downing, pp. 190-196.

¹⁰⁴ See D. S. Slattery, 'Demeter, Persephone and the Alien's Cultural Body', *New Orleans Review*, 19 (1992), 30-35.

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1866 *Poems and Ballads*. Unlike classical storytelling which aims to reconcile polarities, signalling an ongoing cycle of blossoming-death-regeneration and transcendent spheres of experience, Swinburne envisages his own cultural milieu as one posited on the grim inevitability of division, alienation, and repression. He intimates that the true dancing ground for the Demeter-Persephone myth and its 'shadowy' dynamics is now the restlessly modern psyche. How this psyche is disclosed in late-Victorian Persephone poetry comprises the subject of my next chapter.

Chapter 2

Divine Mother and Maid in Victorian Poetry

I

Demeter sighs, but sure 'tis well
The wife should love her destiny:
They part, and yet, as legends tell,
She mourns her lost Persephone;
While chant the maids of Enna still –
'O fateful flower beside the rill –
The daffodil, the daffodil!'

(ll. 106-112)¹

Jean Ingelow's 'Persephone', composed for the Portfolio Society in 1862, and published in Ingelow's 1863 volume *Poems*, offers in its verbal texture a perception which the more frequently-anthologised interpretations by Swinburne, Meredith and Tennyson fail to capture fully: a sense of the myth revised as a searching and subtle critique of the mid-Victorian gender politics that perpetuate the secondary cultural and social status of women.² Ingelow is drawn to the myth as a paradigm in Greek art and literature for human marriage as a rite of initiation; in matrimony the bride undergoes a symbolic death before reincorporation into a new household as wife and mother.³

The unutterably weary 'sigh' of Ingelow's Demeter in the final adroitly structured, incantatory stanza conveys jaundiced recognition not only of the irrevocable and harrowing effects of the abduction, but also signifies that Persephone's arranged marriage to Hades is a 'dark hour' (l. 97) the helpless daughter must learn to 'love' as a divinely ordained 'destiny'.⁴ This cuts

¹ Jean Ingelow, *Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), pp. 112-15.

² For these reasons, Susan Gubar views Persephone as nothing less than 'the central mythic figure for women'. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 302.

³ On the abduction of Persephone and its links in Greek art and poetry with the experience of the Greek bride, see Ian Jenkyns, 'Is There Life After Marriage? A Study of the Abduction Motif in Vase Paintings of the Athenian Wedding Ceremony', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London*, 30 (1983), 137-45. Girls who died before marriage were called 'brides of Hades'. Ancient poets often exploited the similarity of the marriage ceremonial and death as rites of transition from one phase of human existence to another, and sometimes they used Persephone's story to evoke the connection.

⁴ *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, on a divine level, is ideal for Ingelow's polemical purposes: it signals first a resistance by the young bride and her mother to an arranged marriage, and then

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against a reading of the myth based on how the agricultural cycle, Demeter's role as mediator on earth between heaven and Hades, and the stealing and eternal return of Persephone are all 'necessary' to link natural patterns with a human culture characterised by strict regulation of sexuality by matrimony. Instead, the daughter has to deal with the consequences of the most violent sexual interaction between men and women as if it were an irreproachable facet of genteel respectability. This is reminiscent of Michael Field's 1881 evocation of 'the dark world' of 'Aïdoneus' in which the 'Queen of Hades' becomes a spectral apparition cut off from a romantic paradise of carefree joy, 'wasted' and longing for 'the years / Of her girlhood amid the gay fields'.⁵

However, Ingelow implies Persephone's awareness of her own fate is more elliptical than what is strongly hinted by the opening scene of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, which portrays her marriage to Hades as a deceptive and pitiless trick foisted by brutality upon an idyllic mother-daughter relationship. Ingelow's maiden is also strangely entranced as she stoops 'to gather by the rill / The daffodil',⁶ a snare set by the Underworld Lord for whom she feels an intense, mysterious, though unarticulated sexual fascination. Demeter's urgent question centres on why Persephone plucked the 'flower' (l. 111) that binds her to the 'forlorn' wastes of the netherworld. Ingelow intimates Persephone's contradictory longings: the wish to be nurtured and the countervailing impulse to proclaim her own selfhood, unhampered by a stifling self-image dependent on unqualified identification with maternal and domestic duty. But the intricate rhyme scheme also encapsulates in sound-patterns the difficulty of breaking free from the coercive and claustrophobic grip of Hades:

What moved thee, daughter, to forsake
Thy fellow-maids that fatal morn,
And give the dark lord power to take
(ll. 78-80)

stresses a reluctant acceptance of this traumatic transition. Ingelow's poem also registers that whereas the male artist can identify with traditional mythic figures without compromising his self-image or his sexual identity, the female artist is burdened by a heritage of patriarchal myths in a society which affords her few rewards and arbitrarily excludes her from various experiences, thus creating ambivalence about her self-image, whether she tacitly accepts its traditions or disavows the heroinizing of its central myths.

⁵ See Michael Field [K. H. Bradley & E. E. Cooper], 'The Song of Aphrodite', in *Bellerophon* (London: Bell, 1881), ll. 11-15.

⁶ In Dora Greenwell's 1876 lyric 'Demeter and Cora', the daffodil is associated with '[a]ll lovely, free and gentle things' (l. 31) which the Maiden can never again be after her incarceration in Hades. See *Selected Poems by Dora Greenwell* (London, 1889), pp. 136-37.

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Ingelow's Persephone reflects pensively upon the 'fateful doom' that gives Hades dominion over her. The daughter has acquired a vividly realised corporeal identity upon her return to the fecund surface world of 'harvest fields' (l. 59) after enforced withdrawal in the subterranean realm: '[h]er eyelids droop with light oppressed, [...] / Her cheek upon her mother's breast' (ll. 85, 87).⁷ Demeter serves as the fitting symbol of beneficent maternity and loving concern, persevering in her desire to maintain control over her daughter, who represents both the biological extension of Demeter's womanhood and her identity prior to sexual experience. The abducted Persephone emerges as a more nebulous entity, subverting social norms because of her removal from the rhythms of quotidian existence and her indissoluble link with mortality as the infernal queen. For Persephone, Demeter represents both the mothering she craves in an extended childhood and the maternal function she will assume as part of her sexual identity and as a consequence of rape.

Yet Ingelow's Persephone may also logically appeal to male fantasies of power and privilege because of her silent, albeit only seasonal, enslavement to her spouse. She cannot stay with Demeter after her return, not merely because she has eaten 'the cleft pomegranate seeds' (l. 64) that her consort tricked her into consuming, but also because he has 'left his shadow plain to see' on her 'fair face' (ll. 104-5): initiation into heterosexual activity, Ingelow implies, has 'left' its indelible impression or 'trace' (l. 96), irreversibly altering the maiden's subjective perception of 'the fair Eleusian meads' (l. 55) and the condition of near-fusion she once enjoyed with her mother and other young women.⁸ This sharply contrasts with Tennyson's later representation of the returned Persephone, in whose 'face', according to Demeter, a 'gleam of the moon' chases away that 'shadow of a likeness to the king / Of shadows, thy dark mate' (ll. 13-17). This gradual evolution of consciousness, from 'Demeter's daughter fresh', 'child of light, a radiant lass' (ll. 2-3) to 'Calm Queen of Hades' (l. 89) is unavoidable: the stoical and numbed calmness Persephone adopts in the underworld is measured against

⁷ It is precisely this 'warmth' of contact between mother and daughter that Demeter craves in Dora Greenwell's 'Demeter and Cora': '[a]rt listening now, my child, – art near? / Oh that thy kiss upon my cheek / Were warm! Thy little hand in mine' (ll. 61-3). Greenwell's imagery evokes the 'maiden' as a happy-go-lucky and sportive child, which also imbues Henry Taylor's poetic vision: '[w]herein he rambl'd to his knees in flowers / As heedless as Persephone watch'd by Dis' See *The Works Volume III: The Virgin Widow; or, A Sicilian Summer* (London, 1877-78), pp. 176-77.

⁸ Ingelow shows this brief reunion coloured by a melancholy largely absent from William James Linton's 1865 rendering of 'that deep-hearted smile' of Persephone's when closing '[h]er welcoming arms around Demeter's head / Bow'd with its sheaf of joy upon her breast.' See William James Linton, 'Eurydice', in *Claribel* (London, 1865), p. 100.

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her 'gloomy-browed' mother's frantic and febrile preoccupation with her daughter's safety after the seizure.

But Ingelow's closing stanza problematises this idea of Persephone's inexorable growth: 'as legends tell' Demeter 'mourns her lost Persephone' (ll. 108-9). Does Ingelow reveal here the myth is merely one of those canny male-devised 'legends' compelling us to sanction the daughter's rape not as unpunished crime but as the predictable by-product of her wayward curiosity and insistent cravings for greater independence? Ingelow makes a more trenchant point: whatever 'legends' may 'tell' us about the interests of the male chroniclers who invent and perpetuate them, the female poet can successfully inhabit gaps and hesitations in these traditional narratives, fashioning urgently modern meanings that do not blandly reproduce or acquiesce in conventional belief. The myth need not be read as a repressive 'tome of the ancient wisdom' if its pages are 'blank' in an 'unwritten volume of the new'.⁹ Ingelow does not capitulate to the conclusion that the woman of myth is never her own person, unable to establish herself as an active and venturesome subject because she has not yet perfected a demystified religion of her own. Her poem, far from being undemanding evidence of a woman dreaming 'through the dreams of men',¹⁰ adumbrates rather the opposite: that the myth, reviled by some modern feminists, is uniquely suited to the articulation of a multi-layered and mordant female perspective.¹¹ The poem finally avoids becoming an anguished lament for a femininity subsumed in unthinking physicality and glum self-suppression. Ingelow evokes a nuanced mythic heritage and rehabilitates a story about women who are not exclusively engaged in securing or spurning a mate.

II

Jean Ingelow was by no means the first nineteenth-century woman poet to appreciate how the myth might announce a symbiotic state of benevolent sisterhood between mother and daughter, and covertly celebrate the complex dynamics of female consciousness itself. Mary Shelley's *Proserpine*, a verse drama not published until her husband's centenary in 1922, was almost apologetically introduced by her editor as a 'little monument to his wife's collaboration' that might 'take its modest place among the tributes [...] paid

⁹ H.D., *Tribute to the Angels in Trilogy* (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 103.

¹⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H. M. Parshley (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 132.

¹¹ See Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Avon Books, 1972).

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to his memory'.¹² Probably because she herself had lost a daughter, Mary Shelley tells the story almost completely from the mother's perspective, an elegiac tribute to female fecundity as '[l]eaf, and blade, and bud, and blossom'.¹³ Just as Ingelow charts the extent to which the seizure of Persephone severely disrupts a pastoral period of relaxed communality between women, so Act I of Shelley's *Proserpine* recounts the story of Arethusa, the female stream that flees from the brackish waters of pursuing Alpheus, presaging a future disaster that will divide the mother from maiden.

Shelley anticipates Ingelow and other Victorian women poets in rendering the Demeter-Persephone myth as a peculiarly rich female version of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The original verdant garden is lost not through any female transgression, but due to a male predatory interloper. The abduction and rape of the daughter takes place in the silence between Shelley's Acts I and II, implying that the iron car, steeds, and spear of Hades are too terrifying to represent; his absence is fitting since he presides over a domain of non-being. The underworld Lord's 'authority', a bullish and belligerent energy that destroys, is directly opposed to the Mother-Goddess's tender capacity to create and sustain, showing unswerving devotion to her missing child. Susan Gubar pushes the point further: 'Shelley seems drawn to the myth precisely because it allows her to remember a time when such so-called "feminine" qualities as emotional responsiveness, physical spontaneity and instinctual selfhood were valued over "masculine" rationality, competition and control.'¹⁴

While Shelley and Ingelow articulate the mother's grief, Elizabeth Barrett Browning focuses more on the daughter's plight, although she also avoids a direct depiction of the underworld male's aggression. In her verse novel *Aurora Leigh* (1856), Marian Erle's innocence and her child, a 'rosier flushed / Pomegranate' (VI. 564-65) recalls the mythic Persephone.¹⁵

No cleaner maid than I was, took a step
To a sadder end, – no matron-mother now
Looks backward to her early maidenhood
Through chaster pulses.

(VI: 756-759)

¹² Mary Shelley, *Proserpine and Midas*, ed. by A. Koszul (London: Hilford, 1922), p. iii.

¹³ Shelley, *Proserpine*, p. 18.

¹⁴ Gubar, 'Mother, Maiden and the Marriage of Death', p. 304.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems*, ed. by John Robert Glorney Bolton and Julia Bolton Holloway (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995). Through the image of the 'Pomegranate', Barrett Browning evokes her own child and her husband's poems, *Bells and Pomegranates* (1841-46). The image also resonates in 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' (1844), which had prompted their courtship (1845), marriage (1846) and parenthood (1849). Bells and pomegranates were embroidered on the High Priest Aaron's robe when he served in the Temple, (*Exodus* 28: 39).

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Marian describes herself as not 'seduced' but 'simply, murdered' (VI. 769-70). She asks, 'Do wolves seduce a wandering fawn? [...] / Do eagles, who have pinched a lamb with claws, / Seduce it into carrion?' (VI. 766-68). Browning shows Marian, at a much earlier age, fleeing her family when handed over to an affluent squire whose 'beast eyes' seemed 'as if they would swallow her alive' (III. 1050-51). This pernicious pattern of entrapment and deprivation indicates Marian's sexual initiation is an inescapable kidnap to Hades in which she is 'ground', and 'tortured' (VI. 810), implying a 'darkness where obedience was the only seen duty of women'.¹⁶ Marian's plight evinces, in the words of H.D., how the mythical 'script' is itself 'a snare', in which even the most quick-witted heroine would feel enmeshed in an uncongenial and life-denying plot.¹⁷ Compelled to submit to male prerogative, Marian gives birth to a child described as a 'flower of death': like Ingelow's Persephone, Marian is indelibly 'marked' and 'bruised' (VI. 811) by her enforced estrangement from female community in the subterranean setting. Marian senses that the mother in her has survived, but she is 'not less dead for that: [...] nothing more / But just a mother' (VI. 822-23).¹⁸

Ingelow, Shelley, and Barrett Browning provide versions of the Mother and Maiden as recognisably human, fragile, and palpable presences that stand in striking contrast to the disembodied fertility goddess in Algernon Charles Swinburne's 'Proserpine' lyrics.¹⁹ Whereas Ingelow mines the mythic material to explore the impact of a male intruder's unprovoked assault upon a mother-daughter bond Demeter perceives as more precious than her own immortality, the post-Christian Swinburne reappraises the ancient text to foreground issues of continuance beyond the grave feverishly debated among his peers. Swinburne registers to what extent the vague prospect of immortality was assessed by many nineteenth-century writers who maintained liberal or even wildly unorthodox views about the Christian theology of the afterlife. Dickens, Emily Brontë, Tennyson, and the

¹⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. by J. A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 109.

¹⁷ H. D., *Helen in Egypt* (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 220.

¹⁸ Mother-figures hold an ambiguous status in Barrett Browning's poetic scheme. Browning does allow Marian Erle to be discovered by the wandering Aurora Leigh and to be saved. Yet Marian's rape is at least partially instigated by the jealous machinations first of her mother and then of Lady Waldemar.

¹⁹ See Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Hymn to Proserpine' and 'The Garden of Proserpine' in *Poems and Ballads* and *Atalanta in Calydon*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2000), pp. 55, 136.

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Brownings all attempted to hold onto 'the steadfast rock of Immortality' with a desperate energy.²⁰

What takes place after death, and what slender form of life in futurity, if any, is vouchsafed the visionary artist through the continuation of his work, are key questions imbuing the majority of Victorian poems written by men on what Francis Turner Palgrave called in 1871 the 'realm of the dread Maid, Demeter's child, / Who gathers all, and gives none back again'.²¹ Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine', 'The Garden of Proserpine', 'At Eleusis' and 'Hesperia', perform a tricky act of negotiation with ideas of pagan survival and poetic endurance. For Swinburne, persistent engagement with unresolved questions about how his own words might contribute to human culture infuses his self-defining refutation of Christian faith and its theology of the afterlife.

III

Swinburne's Proserpine lyrics, though hinging upon issues of temporal continuation and historical flux, refuse to dramatise the brooding anxiety over the soul's endurance fuelling Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850). Nor do they seek the glib consolations of kindly revenants in the final poem of Christina Rossetti's *Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets* (1881), where the speaker finds solace in benign phantasmal presences: 'the dead may be around us, dear and dead / The unforgotten dearest dead may be / Watching us with unslumbering eyes and heart' (ll. 9-11).²² Without aping the secular

²⁰ Emily Brontë, 'No Coward Soul Is Mine', in *Poems*, ed. by Rosemary Hartill (London: Stacey, 1973), p. 143.

²¹ Palgrave, 'Alcestis: Book First', in *Lyrical Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1871), pp. 34-35, ll. 171-72. The 'Argument' to Palgrave's poetic version of *Alcestis* explains: 'Admetus, son of Pheres and Clymené, and King of Pherae in Thessaly, has married Alcestis, daughter to Pelias and Anaxibia of Iolkos, a city on the stream Anauros under Mount Pelion, at the head of the gulf of Pagasa. Admetus is claimed by the Fates for early death, unless one of his family will die for him, according to the terms obtained at his marriage by Apollo. His parents refuse; whereupon Alcestis dies for him. But Persephoné-Kora, Queen of the world below, moved by the self-sacrifice of Alcestis, restores her to life. Another version describes her as recovered from Death by Herakles. The intervention of Persephoné appearing to be the older and nobler form of the myth (although against the authority of *Euripides*), has been here preferred. It is not known how this point was dealt with in the *Admetus* of *Sophocles*' (p. 1).

²² Such an approach may seem inevitable, given that the myth of the Maiden's death and return, and the Eleusinian Mysteries devoted to the worship of Demeter and Persephone, seem to have promised eternal life. Said Sophocles: '[t]hrice blessed are those among men who, after beholding [the Mysteries], go down to Hades. Only for them is there life; all the rest will suffer an evil lot.' Sophocles Triptolemos, fragment 837, quoted in Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal*

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extremes of Percy Shelley's *Adonais* (1821) – locating comfort in the notion that the dead no longer register the grievous disappointments of earthly life – Swinburne's Proserpine lyrics hesitantly contemplate the problems and possibilities of departed energy returning to irradiate the twilight years.²³

Swinburne anticipates Ezra Pound and H.D. who invoke the ancient gods not only as figurative markers in civilised discourse, but also as psychological markers within the creative process itself. But a belief, in the words of 'The Last Oracle', that the pagan 'past is not utterly past'²⁴ is smothered by a bleak awareness that ancient deities and occult practices have been assimilated into orthodox Christianity through its unrelenting crusade to project itself as more palatable to the peoples it strives to quell and convert. In 'Hymn to Proserpine', an attenuated Demeter is preserved by the Church as a masculine saint figure – Saint Demetrius, patron of agriculture.

'Hymn to Proserpine', the monologue of an ancient pagan, mourns the collapse of his religion at the arrival of a sterile Christianity, a faith inimical to the sensual indulgences of his tangible milieu. The 'Hymn' projects – in a manner not dissimilar to Robert Browning's dramatic monologues in *Men and Women* (1855) and *Dramatis Personae* (1864) – an individual anxiously situated at a cultural crossroads in Western religious history.²⁵ Swinburne

Image of Mother and Daughter, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 14.

²³ See Swinburne, 'The Last Oracle (A.D. 361)', l. 1. This notion of meditating on the 'departed' by invoking 'Proserpina' or 'Persephone' is also exploited by Walter Savage Landor: '[n]othing of death can any feel or know. / Girls who delight to dwell / Where grows most asphodel, / Gather to their calm breasts each word you speak: / The mild Persephone/ Places you on her knee, / And your cool palm smoothes down stern Pluto's cheek'. See CXXII [Ternissa! you are fled!], in Walter Savage Landor, *Poems, Dialogues in Verse and Epigrams* (1892), *Volume II: Poems and Epigrams chiefly from the collection of 1846*, ed. by Charles G. Crump (London: Dent, 1892), p. 56.

²⁴ Swinburne, 'The Last Oracle', l. 41. These themes are especially prominent in *Poems and Ballads, Second Series* (1878). The volume is dedicated to the scholar and adventurer Richard Francis Burton (1821-90) and is inscribed 'in redemption of an old pledge', which acknowledges a duty with its origin in the past. This provides the reader with a clue to an issue richly present in the volume itself. In 'A Forsaken Garden' the sere remains of spectral survival, the 'ghost of a garden' that 'fronts the sea' (l. 4), while 'Relics' thinks of memories that 'revive' (l. 9). 'A Wasted Vigil' reflects both on stars that die but 'day [that] survives' (l. 7), and on the near-opposite of 'stars [that] endure after the moon has past' (l. 46). 'Memorial Verses' asks tentatively 'wherefore should the Mayflower outlast May' (l. 16) and 'A Vision of Spring in Winter' is radiant with the energising appearance of a past season in the present, as 'Inferiae', on the death of Swinburne's father, begins similarly with thoughts about the 'Requickening' (l. 2) of the spring to meditate on the continuation of the sun which is 'life and heat and light / And sets not nor is dark when dark are we' (ll. 19-20). At the level of individual images, single lines, and clipped observations, *Poems and Ballads, Second Series* returns over and again to forms of survival, vestigial remnants, and ghostly residues.

²⁵ Browning himself may have deplored this comparison given that his judgement of Swinburne, fiercely contested even in their own era, continues to mar a fuller appreciation of the Proserpine

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turns away from Demeter to Proserpina, who becomes the core embodiment of a beleaguered, though cherished, pagan ideal. Swinburne's speaker laments the dishonouring and remorseless erasure from consciousness of the feminine deity and all she personifies: the hypocritical requisition of her powers by a ruthless, renegade, masculine invader. Even more scolding is the dominance of a split-off masculine vision that defines itself by its autonomy from female, body, and nature; and the reductive imposition of this autonomy as the only blueprint for social identity in both men and women. All this is intermingled with the long shadow cast by the 'pale Galilean' and a Christian faith that has made 'the whole world moan with hymns of wrath and wrong'.²⁶

The 'Hymn to Proserpine' exploits the associations that cluster around the youthful goddess to protest against the dissolving of the pagan faith she personifies and its violent usurpation by Christian teaching.²⁷ The motto epigraph of the 'Hymn' *Vicisti, Galilæe* ('You have conquered, Galilean') were the supposed dying words of Julian the Apostate, emperor of Rome 360-63, who had unsuccessfully tried to restore paganism to the empire.²⁸ Swinburne's speaker sarcastically adapts the emperor's declaration to accommodate his antipathy for a stultifying Christian creed.

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown
grey from thy breath;
We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness
of death.

lyrics: 'Swinburne's verses [...] are "florid impotence", to my taste, the *minimum* of thought and idea in the *maximum* of words, and phraseology. Nothing said and done with, left to stand alone and trust for its effect in its own worth'. Robert Browning, letter to Isabella Blagden, 22 March 1870, quoted in *Swinburne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Clyde K. Hyder (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 115. Compare Tennyson's remark on Swinburne that he was a 'reed through which all things blow in to music'. See *The Swinburne Letters*, ed. by Cecil Y. Lang, 6 vols (New Haven, 1959-62), I, p. xix.

²⁶ Swinburne, 'The Last Oracle', l. 32. The emperor's dying speech in this poem, which Swinburne had quoted sympathetically in the 'Hymn to Proserpine', seems now to have self-destructive potency, his own words becoming a part of the violence that kills him: '[t]hou has conquered, he said, / Galilean; he said it, and died'. (ll. 15-16).

²⁷ See Margot K. Louis, *Swinburne and His Gods: The Roots and Growth of an Agnostic Poetry* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

²⁸ Constantine I, the first Christian Roman emperor, issued the Edict of Milan in 313 with the Eastern Roman emperor Licinius; it established religious toleration of Christians and protected their legal rights. Constantine's policy went further than official toleration, and he began to establish Rome as a Christian state. His nephew Julian (emperor from 361 to 363) announced his conversion to paganism in 361 and hence is known as Julian the Apostate. See L. M. Findlay, 'The Art of Apostasy', *Victorian Poetry*, 28 (1990), 69-78, for Victorian controversies over 'national apostasy' and the image of Julian. Julian became a vehement opponent of Christians, but his antagonism had little enduring effect. His legendary dying words ('Thou has conquered, Galilean') were reported in Greek by Theodoret, the Bishop of Cyrrhus, in the fifth century.

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Laurel is green for a season, and love is sweet for a day;
But love grows bitter with treason, and laurel outlives not
May.
Sleep, shall we sleep after all? for the world is not sweet in
the end;

For the old faiths loosen and fall, the new years ruin and
rend.
Fate is a sea without shore, and the soul is a rock that
abides;
But her ears are vexed with the roar and her face with the
foam of the tides.
O lips that the live blood faints in, the leavings of racks and
rods!
O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods!
(ll. 35-44)

In the 'Hymn', Proserpine is earth's daughter, and like all of earth's offspring she belongs in the dark of the soil. As goddess of mortality, she will overpower all other deities, both pagan and Christian; Venus and Apollo have perished and the Galilean's austere kingdom will pass, but the 'Goddess and maiden and queen' ('Hymn' l. 2) of the departed 'surely abide[s] in the end'.²⁹ Her gifts, the rose-sweet poppies of forgetfulness, are superior to art and love, more substantial than the gifts of Christ and Mary ('Hymn' ll. 71-90). For in Proserpine's domain only, according to Swinburne's speaker, is there serene harmony and the calm of oblivion: '[t]here is no God found stronger than death; and death is a sleep' ('Hymn' l. 110). This final statement, in what has been interpreted as a foretaste of modish 1890s nihilism, bluntly repudiates the Christian doctrine of immortality, and even the desire for everlasting life.³⁰ These lines fortify a sense, not so much of the defeat of death, but of its terrible and desolating ubiquity. Swinburne's 'Proserpine' lyrics tackle, with a fretful energy that is at times virulent, the growing challenge of pessimism to contend the moral implications of mortality, the sanctity or outrage of the material universe, and whether despair emancipates individual consciousness instead of crushing it.³¹ Given

²⁹ Swinburne, *The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London, 1904), I, pp. 67-82, lines 91-94 (line enumeration mine).

³⁰ The yearning for immortality is posited on the assumption that life has intrinsic value, a view strongly attacked by Arthur Schopenhauer earlier in the century.

³¹ Rikky Rooksby, charting the turbulent reception of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads, First Series* writes of the consequences on Swinburne's public persona: '[i]t confirmed and darkened the literary reputation [he] had gained with *Atalanta*, It made him an international figurehead for sexual, religious and political radicalism', and his name 'became charged with a satanic aura'. See Rikky Rooksby, *A.C. Swinburne: A Poet's Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), p. 135.

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the stringency of these poetic sentiments, it is unsurprising that Swinburne was 'one of Hardy's earliest and strongest literary infatuations'.³²

'Hymn to Proserpine' and the better-known if gentler lyric 'The Garden of Proserpine', provoked John Morley to respond that Swinburne was always either 'the vindictive apostle of a crushing and ironshod despair', or else 'the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs'.³³ Jane Harrison's reaction to Swinburne's 'Proserpine' poems was in striking contrast to Morley's hysterical censure. She resonated with the classical ideas and imagery, but also fell under the hypnotic spell of the Swinburnian cadences, his 'beguiling witchery of sound'.³⁴ To her, Swinburne's poetic vision in the Proserpine lyrics epitomised 'passion and rebellion and liberty and the sea',³⁵ as opposed to the deadening disappointment of everyday perception, 'the dull residuum of golden dreams'.³⁶ It was Swinburne's avowed aim to subordinate his own gifts to the ideal of re-creating a version of Hellenism for the sustenance of

³² See 'Annotations', in *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Lennart A. Björk, 2 vols (London: Macmillan 1985), I, entry 1288. In Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, ed. with introd. Patricia Ingham (Oxford: World's Classics, 1986), Christminster (Oxford), an 'ancient medieval pile' whose 'dark corners [...] no lamplight reached', is a world 'grown grey' from the 'breath' of Swinburne's 'pale Galilean', Jesus Christ (p. 79). Sue Bridehead quotes Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine': 'O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods!' and '[t]hou hast conquered, O pale Galilean / The world has grown grey from thy breath!' (p. 97) Swinburne is a favourite author for Sue because, Hardy implies, she thinks of him as crusading for a renewal of a pagan erotic religious impulse commemorating forces close to the secret wellsprings of natural fertility. But the human energies that Demeter and Persephone epitomise have no place in the unreal city of Christminster. Moreover, Sue fervently opposes the sexual experience that would logically accompany her philosophy.

³³ John Morley, *Saturday Review*, 22 (4 August 1866), 145-47, reprinted in *The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Hyder, p. 29. John Morley argued that Swinburne was incurably attached to 'nameless shameless foulnesses' and 'pieces which many a professional vendor of filthy prints might blush to sell if only he knew what they meant' (p. 29). The controversy that greeted the publication of *Poems and Ballads First Series* had made Swinburne's name: Morley's intemperate response was a forerunner of the 'Fleshly School' argument between Robert Buchanan and D. G. Rossetti in 1871-72. Swinburne's supposedly hazardous radicalism and his alleged 'immorality' became the magnetic subject of widespread public dissension. Robert Buchanan was one of Swinburne's reviewers too, but he was not to be the volume's most vocal antagonist, saying in curt, peremptory criticism merely that the poems 'are unclean, with little power; and mere uncleanness repulses'. See Robert Buchanan, *Athenaeum* (4 August 1866), reprinted in *The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Hyder, p. 31. Morley does concede though that 'Hymn to Proserpine' contains 'passages of rare vigour' (p. 27), and, like Robert Buchanan in his less imperious assault on the *Poems and Ballads* (p. 32), quotes from the 'Hymn' at some length.

³⁴ Francis O' Gorman, 'Swinburne's Returns: The Endurance of Writing in *Poems and Ballads*, *Second Series* (1878)', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 33 (2004), 197.

³⁵ H. J. C. Grierson, *Swinburne* (London: Longmans, 1959), p. 6.

³⁶ Harrison, quoted in Annabel Robinson, *The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), p. 55. More than anything else at this period of her life, Jane Harrison sought, according to Robinson, emotional liberation from the weight of her oppressively orthodox religious upbringing: the 'Hymn to Proserpine' signified this cathartic release.

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those consigned to a hidebound and humourless cultural milieu in which ‘*the watersprings that spake are quenched and dead*’.³⁷

In his ‘Notes on *Poems and Reviews*’ (1866), Swinburne describes ‘The Garden of Proserpine’ as a dramatically expressive lyric rather than as a crisp and systematic philosophical statement; it illustrates ‘that brief total pause of passion and of thought’ (after ‘tempestuous pleasures’) when ‘the spirit, without fear or hope of good things or evil, hungers and thirsts only after the perfect sleep’.³⁸ In this poem Proserpine stands at the garden-entrance to the domain of the dead, garlanded with a crown of poppies and having prepared a wine of oblivion from them. Although Wordsworth’s ‘A slumber did my spirit seal’ (1800) and Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ (1819) famously invoke the easeful or restful condition of death, a theme continued by Tennyson’s ‘The Lotos-Eaters’ (1832) and Christina Rossetti’s sonnet ‘Rest’ (1862), Swinburne’s lyric is unusual in expressing feelings generalized, codified, and theoretically validated by a worldview whose tone is ‘pointedly unconsoled, even anti-consolatory’.³⁹ Celebrating the finality of death, he depicts the tranquil ‘pale’ charm of the goddess who welcomes the poet-speaker in retreat from ‘tears and laughter’:

No growth of moor or coppice,
No heather flower or vine,
But bloomless buds of poppies,
Green grapes of Proserpine,
Pale beds of blowing rushes
Where no leaf blooms or blushes
Save this whereout she crushes
For dead men deadly wine.
(ll. 25-32)

Swinburne diminishes Proserpine’s tangible actuality both here and in the ‘Hymn’. Even in the blank verse of ‘At Eleusis’, when Demeter tries to ascribe vivid physical specificity to her lost daughter, she remains nebulous and insubstantial:

Seeing I have sworn by the pale temples’ band
And popped hair of gold Persephone
Sad-tressed and pleached low down about her brows,

³⁷ Swinburne, ‘The Last Oracle’, l. 8. The 1866 *Poems and Ballads* was sternly rebuked by reviewers for its ‘depravity’ and ‘feculent corruption’, with Swinburne pilloried for his ‘passionate zest and long-drawn elaboration of enjoyment’ of vice. See the unsigned review in *London Review* (4 August 1866), xiii, 130-31, in *The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Hyder, p. 36f.

³⁸ See Swinburne, *Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, ed. by Edmund Gosse and T.J. Wise, 20 vols (London, 1926), XVI, pp. 361-62.

³⁹ Melissa F. Zieger, *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality, and the Changing Shapes of Elegy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 26.

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And by the sorrow in her lips, and death
Her dumb and mournful-mouthed minister
(ll. 207-11)

Though commentators maintain that the physical presence of Swinburne's female figures tends to dissolve through synecdoche into an impressionistic haze of rarefied grace, Proserpine is the most ungraspable entity. Indeed, Swinburne's fate has frequently been to be perceived as a poet too engrossed with diffuse verbal textures. Browning's exasperation with the author of *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) and *A Song of Italy* (1867) was recognition in part of this seemingly distracting metaphoricity. In the 'Hymn', Venus has raiment, a head, fragrant hair, a flushed and shimmering body, and 'her foot on the sea' (ll. 79, 73, 82, 83-86); Proserpine has only eyes like moons and 'the sweet low light of [her] face' (ll. 95, 101), signifying the radiance of consciousness liberated from the prison-house of flesh. This is a less threatening and sinister rendering than that in Francis Turner Palgrave's 'Alceste' (1871): 'Persephone, crown'd with harvest's golden ear, / And eyes too dreadful to be look'd upon' (ll. 236-37). In 'The Garden', Proserpine uses 'cold immortal hands' to garner 'all things mortal', not merely the flowers, since in her new realm 'flowers are put to scorn' ('Garden', l. 64) but also the tainted, trivial and perishable blossoms of human lives. The chill of her immortality in this death-obsessed poem negates any gentle sense of palpable presence that the image of the hands might otherwise imply. This Proserpine also has pale skin and 'languid lips' ('Garden', l. 53) denoting a form at once delicate and seductive. Swinburne's Proserpine, as a death-goddess, must evoke either a cadaver or the bodiless state itself; but since she also disavows life as a gesture to be valued, she epitomises a rejection of the female body as a vessel of earthly existence.⁴⁰

Swinburne fashions a Proserpine in these poems as the antithesis to Venus, a luxuriously fecund and joyously sensual figure who exhibits 'deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of flowers' (l. 82). Venus exudes a triumphant maternity: she is a powerfully procreative 'mother of Rome'

⁴⁰ With some changes of detail, 'At Eleusis', written in blank verse, keeps close to the story of Demeter as it is told in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (which had been translated by P.B. Shelley around 1818 and published in 1839). In the poem, Swinburne presents Demeter as an ambiguous mother-goddess, a Great Mother who, although an artist of nature, carving 'the shapes of grass and tender corn' and colouring 'the ripe edges and long spikes / With red increase and the grace of gold', paradoxically chooses to make earth sterile just as 'ill men' may produce infertility in the womb (*Poems*, 1:209). Demeter at this point is 'Visible evil' (1:211), but on the other hand, she is devoted to her daughter, and does her best to give Triptolemus eternal life. On the intense ambivalence with which Swinburne contemplates this divine mother, see John Hollander, 'Algernon Charles Swinburne's "At Eleusis"', *Paris Review*, 154 (2000), 246-51.

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(‘Hymn’, l. 80). Proserpine on the other hand is in both poems a baffling conundrum, a goddess as mixed metaphor combining the visual and aural, whose outlines dissolve in an enticing, willed haze. She is the daughter who ‘forgets the earth her mother’ (‘Garden’, l. 59) and who is estranged from its cyclical rhythms and the banal facts of matter itself. In the ‘Hymn to Proserpine’ Venus’s vibrant immediacy is measured against Proserpine’s almost total abdication from that arena of bodily delight, through which Swinburne proposes metaphors evading crisp precision with a sustained strategic deliberateness. This duality also infuses the ‘Fatal’ Proserpine figures fashioned by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Swinburne’s close friend at the period of these poems. As Rossetti’s paintings demonstrate visually, the Pre-Raphaelite Proserpine is a strangely pallid but sultry-looking queen, drained, indeed almost lifeless through sleep-inducing poppies, despite making a spectacular appeal to the senses.

IV

Dante Gabriel Rossetti completed three canvases of the eight he began that portrayed the mythological goddess Proserpine.⁴¹ He also wrote two versions of a sonnet to accompany the work, one in Italian and one in English. The eighth and final composition was completed just a few days before his death and is the only one to display the English version of the sonnet. It is also unique in that Rossetti replaced the abundant mass of wavy black hair of the model Jane Morris, with the red of Elizabeth Siddal. The viewer concentrates on the slender elongated hands, one of which holds the pomegranate; and on the sorrowful, preoccupied face of the model, turned away from the spectator, as if lost in some quiet reverie.

Rossetti’s visual and literary representation of Proserpine was to D. H. Lawrence a cynical counterfeiting of real emotions, sapped of natural heartiness and lacking the sensual quality it seemed to flaunt.⁴² As a mythological figure, Proserpine harmonises with Rossetti’s artistic manifesto of replication and resurrection. Her abduction at the hands of Pluto and subsequent interment in the underworld for six months of each year places her at the centre of a struggle between life and death evinced through a multitude of images such as light and dark, hope and despair, renewal and

⁴¹ These were all ostensibly the same composition.

⁴² The Pre-Raphaelite version of Persephone becomes a vital reference point for Lawrence, whose *The White Peacock* (1911) relates his teasing, callous heroine Lettie to works by Edward Burne-Jones (to whom Swinburne dedicated *Poems and Ballads First Series*), Aubrey Beardsley, and Rossetti’s replicas of *Proserpine*, in which the title figure sulkily, almost coyly, displays the pomegranate that binds her to a yearly term with the Underworld Lord.

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decay, togetherness and separation, which are so integral to Rossetti's oeuvre:

Afar away the light that brings cold cheer
Unto this wall, – one instant and no more
Admitted at my distant palace-door.
Afar the flowers of Enna from this drear
Dire fruit, which, tasted once, must thrall me here.
Afar those skies from this Tartarean grey
That chills me: and afar, how far away,
The nights that shall be from the days that were.

Afar from mine own self I seem, and wing
Strange ways in thought, and listen for a sign:
And still some heart unto some soul doth pine,
(Whose sounds mine inner sense is fain to bring,
Continually together murmuring,) –
“Woe’s me for thee, unhappy Proserpine!”⁴³

Without refining the minute particulars of Proserpine's mythological narrative, the poem deals with concerns that Rossetti raises in the sonnet written on Leonardo's *Virgin and Child*. His own contemplation of the female divinity took on a variety of representations, but his fascination with the reduction of divine or ultimate sorrow remains throughout his artistic career, beginning with the Virgin Mary and ending with Proserpine. His sonnet opens by evoking a distinct lack of light ‘that brings cold cheer’ for an ‘instant and no more’ (ll. 1-2). This image is far from the vale of ‘Enna’ where Proserpine was snatched by the lustful Pluto. The sonnet casts a shadow over that life once apprehended, conveying a feeling of the chill emptiness of nights to come. The transient nature of existence is constructed through this image of light narrowed and restricted, much as it is in ‘Our Lady of the Rocks’, where ‘[t]ime’s each instant’ demands a blessing for the dead, and the ‘Tartarean grey’ invokes the ‘dark avenue / Amid the bitterness of things occult’. The sestet of the ‘Proserpine’ sonnet expresses the imprisoned female, echoing the transformation of Mary following the Annunciation: ‘[a]far from mine own self I seem, and wing / Strange ways in thought, and listen for a sign: / And still some heart unto some soul doth pine’ (ll. 9-11). As the immortal female figure cast in the role of sorrow and bereavement, Proserpine prefigures the Virgin Mary, but in Rossetti's art she is created out of Mary.

Swinburne's Proserpine lyrics avoid Rossetti's visual and verbal emphasis on the goddess as a product of his multiple visions of Mary's ‘great

⁴³ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Poetical Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. with preface by William M. Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1907), p. 371.

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sorrow and great reward': 'What more of anguish than / Endurance oft hath lived through, the whole space / Through night till day, passed weak upon her face'.⁴⁴ But both are drawn to Proserpine as a feminine ideal of death-worship, evacuated of vibrant, enabling attributes. In Swinburne's 'Garden' the young goddess is only one among myriad images of oblivion by which the reader's perception is relocated to a trance-like visionary comprehension of the 'sleep eternal / In an eternal night' with which the poem concludes ('Garden', ll. 95-6). Proserpine represents nullity, a void of unbeing, pointing to the abject failure of all signification, questioning the status of language to distil not only this condition, but all life's perfidious, impermanent 'dreams' ('Garden', l.15). This is in striking contrast to the later Swinburne poem 'In Memory of Barry Cornwall',⁴⁵ which revisits the Proserpine imagery (flowers and the soft sweet slumber of death), and adds a teasing sense of incorporeal, ineffable continuation largely absent from the earlier lyrics:

Time takes them home that we loved, fair names and famous,
To the soft long sleep, to the broad sweet bosom of death;
But the flower of their souls he shall take not away to shame us,
Nor the lips lack song for ever that now lack breath.
For with us shall the music and perfume that die not dwell,
Though the dead to our dead bid welcome, and we farewell.
(ll. 31-6)

The wistful interlocking of 'death [...] breath' and 'dwell [...] farewell' captures the inevitability of earthly life's cessation, but despite negatives – 'take not', '[n]or [...] lack song [...] lack breath [...] die not' – the stanza intimates a plangent feeling for some fragile, flickering hope of continuance for Cornwall's cadence despite the ultimate clammy confinement of the grave. The images and rhythms, the substance and formal movements, express with delicate sureness of touch how Cornwall is absorbed into the climate in which men and women live too, as if mysteriously part of the breathed atmosphere, through the lulling intangibles of 'music and perfume', sound, and scent.⁴⁶ In Swinburne's Proserpine lyrics, however, the goddess of

⁴⁴ Rossetti, 'For a Virgin and Child by Hans Memmelinck', *Poetical Works*, p. 348.

⁴⁵ 'Barry Cornwall' was Bryan Procter (1787-1874), a poet and dramatist and friend of Leigh Hunt, Charles Lamb, and Charles Dickens.

⁴⁶ Such metaphors belong loosely in the venerable tradition that figured the dead speaking from the grave, though they also imply more pointedly Swinburne's fascinated response to his mid-1870s cultural moment with its emergent technologies of communication. In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell had patented the telephone and exchanged the first brief conversations through cable; the first public line – between New York and Boston – was opened the following year; later in 1877, Thomas Edison invented the first rudimentary phonograph, a combination of telephone and telegraph technology, for recording the human voice. Thus Swinburne's poetic focus on the disembodiment of the speaking voice, the possibility both of being heard despite

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sleep is a galling reminder that the things blithely designated as concrete actuality are not victoriously clear, but rather are sketchy, treacherous and ephemeral figures offering no guarantee of a more rewarding existence. Swinburne presents a universe whose torment is a weary weight sustained by the blind will to live, which we must learn to deny. This may be one reason why the Proserpine poems exert such an irresistible hold over Hardy's imagination in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*: with sumptuous verbal strategies the 'Garden' signifies that words, however mellifluous, have only a tenuous and unstable relation to the things they describe.⁴⁷ Hardy relished the caustic irony that regardless of whether we turn towards the Hymn's expansive, rolling, hexameter cadences, or The Garden's more compact iambic trimeters,⁴⁸ the goddess infusing both poems conveys the unsettling absence of rhythmical poise and order, the slippery ambiguities of language itself, and the ineluctable slide into meaningless flux.

One of the first poems overtly to address the image of Swinburne's sinister fertility goddess was penned by Christina Rossetti's Anglican feminist friend Dora Greenwell, in the 1869 volume *Carmina Crucis*. Greenwell's poem 'The Garden of Proserpine' identifies the driving energy of the myth as intoxicatingly sensual rather than strictly and narrowly pious. Greenwell reappraises Swinburne's concept of Proserpine's association with poppies, narcotised slumber, and mortality to denote the soul's hesitant yet highly charged awareness of physical appetite at odds with religious teaching:

No roses, white nor red,
Glow here, the poppy's head
Droops drown'd in spells that keep

corporeal absence and of speaking after death, are not fey imaginings but articulate a world transforming itself. This poem may have influenced W. H. Auden in his delineation of Sigmund Freud as absorbed after his death into the perspective of an entire culture, existing no more as a 'person / now but a whole climate of opinion.' ('In Memory of Sigmund Freud', ll. 67-8). See W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1991).

⁴⁷ Frank M. Turner, in *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, argues that George Grote's seminal *History of Greece*, with its 'location of the origin of myth in the functioning of the imagination' – imagination, that is, conceived in an associationist manner, as an emotion-driven process of connecting diverse materials – provided a 'useful finite concept of myth and imagination for writers' (p. 95). Yet this 'finite concept of the imagination' (pp. 95-96) itself was bound to problematise the status of language in imaginative works, insofar as that language attempts to express philosophical vision as well as feeling.

⁴⁸ Swinburne's iambic trimeters in 'The Garden of Proserpine' use the rhyme scheme *ababcccb*, where *b* is the only masculine rhyme. Swinburne discusses the triplet rhyme in a short piece on Robert Herrick [*Studies in Prose and Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1894), p. 46], where he extols an instance of it in Herrick as 'worthy of Miss Rossetti herself; and praise of such work can go no higher'. The octave of 'The Garden of Proserpine' is identical to the stanza of Dryden's song 'Farewell ungrateful traitor' from Act 5 of *The Spanish Fryar*.

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The keys of death and sleep,
Of anguish, ecstasy, and wild desire
(ll. 13-17)

In the final four lines – reminiscent of the ‘daffodil’ refrain of Jean Ingelow’s ‘Persephone’ – Greenwell’s Proserpine measures her own intense yearning to recover lost virginity (‘a crimson stain’, ‘petal hints at grief’) against the ‘brief thrill of rapture in a pang that dies’ experienced in Pluto’s bed of fragile blossoms.⁴⁹

Here walks a Queen with steadfast eyes unwet,
With white Narcissus garlanded, that still
Dreams of fair Enna’s sunlit mead, and yet
Mourns for the fresh, ungather’d daffodil.
(ll. 24-27)

Whereas Ingelow’s tightly regulated stanzas and lulling ‘daffodil’ refrains enact a numbed, disoriented coming to terms with Persephone’s enforced withdrawal from the mother, Greenwell’s nervously variable metrical patterns and rhyme schemes manifest a chafing unease at how irreversible changes have taken effect, to which the speaker cannot be silently reconciled.

Ingelow and Greenwell both adopt the Persephone myth as a means of portraying how heterosexual experience in general, and bourgeois matrimony in particular, disrupts the traditional communal ties between women. This poetic tactic is a counterbalance to the themes of pessimism and immortality explored with dogmatic severity in Swinburne’s Proserpine lyrics.⁵⁰ The conversational, intimate tetrameter couplets of Greenwell’s lyric ‘Demeter and Cora’ from the *Camera Obscura* volume (1876),⁵¹ amplify the multifaceted sexual motifs investing her ‘Garden of Proserpine’. Greenwell’s Maiden goddess is beguiled by that ‘garden rare’ (l. 65) with its ‘dark, fiery, sweet’ Hell-flowers (l. 66), while also seeking the artless sensuality of her earlier contact with her mother.

⁴⁹ Dora Greenwell, *Selected Poems by Dora Greenwell* (London, 1889), pp. 136-37.

⁵⁰ For Lewis Morris however, in his popular poem *The Epic of Hades* (London: Kegan Paul, 1880), Swinburne’s expansive cadences are insufficient to express the full extent of Persephone’s journey that embraces both the precious secret of decay, which makes human love possible, and the moment of resurrection, which is the supreme triumph of divine love. His Persephone, with a venturesome spirit reminiscent of Eve, wanders the groves of Hades and consumes a ‘gold mystic fruit’ from a tree, ‘with a fair seed / Hid in it’ and on eating knows ‘the tree was Life, / And the fruit Death, and the hid seed was Love’. Love’s ‘subtle alchemy’ transfigures Persephone, so her primary connection is no longer with her mother (Earth), but with her consort Death. This evokes Ingelow’s ‘Persephone’ in which ‘Demeter sighs, but sure ’tis well / The wife should love her destiny’. For Morris, this moment is rapt and revelatory; Ingelow’s cadence is coloured by stinging disappointment.

⁵¹ Dora Greenwell, *Camera Obscura* (London, 1876), pp. 110-11.

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But, mother, tell me of the wet
Cool primrose! Of the lilac bough
And its warm gust of rapture, met
In summer days! – art listening yet?
(ll. 75-78)

The carefully calibrated description of Cora's underworld garden, the perishable beauty of whose flowers is alliteratively 'fed with fire' (l 71), evokes not only Baudelairean *fleurs du mal* but invite comparisons with Swinburne. However, Greenwell's portrayal of 'fair', 'large-leaved', 'large-blossomed' plants conveys an overflowing ripeness transcending the parched, barren elegance of Swinburne's 'Garden of Proserpine' whose destructive iconoclasm seems to induce a modern existential misery by which selfhood is 'shut fast / In its own jail of [...] solitary pain'.⁵² The intensity of feeling inspired by these flowers ('They kindle in a torch-like flame / Half-ecstasy, half tender shame', ll. 72-3) moves away from straightforward floral metaphor to give veiled indications of what Greenwell signals as the subjective experience of a 'fallen woman'. Cora's insistence that these blooms are 'frail' and soon to die (ll. 110-11) reaffirms a traditional association of female beauty and sexuality with the swift mortality of flowers, as in Edmund Waller's 'Go, Lovely Rose' or Robert Herrick's 'To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time'; but while this association is usually affirmed to exhort women to indulge men's desires, Greenwell employs it here not only to privilege female satisfaction, but to denote that the attainment of such satisfaction is morally problematic.

George Meredith, Swinburne's friend and fellow radical, stubbornly resists Swinburne's disillusioned semiotics while reinforcing his firm rejection of an orthodox Christian afterlife.⁵³ Meredith's *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* (1883) were reviewed by the *St. James's Gazette* as a compelling antidote to the 'deeply pessimistic note' typical 'of much of the poetry that has appeared lately'; and by the *Pall Mall Gazette* as reviving 'an old aim of the poet, now in some danger of being forgotten, that of celebrating the good which man has in that he simply lives and shares in the seasons'.⁵⁴ Both reviews warmly praise 'The Day of the Daughter of Hades',

⁵² Morris, *The Epic of Hades*, p. 6.

⁵³ In his novel *Beauchamp's Career*, Meredith presents a hero in whom Swinburnean brio is frustrated by a self-destructive quixoticism; Beauchamp drowns at the end of the novel, trying to save a child. See George Meredith, *Beauchamp's Career*, 2 vols (1874-75; reprint, New York, 1910), II, pp. 313-15.

⁵⁴ Unsigned reviews reprinted in *Meredith: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Ioan Williams (London: Routledge, 1971), pp. 241, 246. For specific comments on 'The Day of the Daughter of Hades', see pp. 244, 246.

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which furnishes a new addition to the myth, in the figure of Skiageneia ('shade-born'), Persephone's daughter by Hades. Skiageneia, forbidden by Hades to visit the living upper world, has for once concealed herself in her mother's chariot to see that vibrant locale in which she can never stay and to which, she knows, she is doomed never to return. Her encounter with the mortal singer Callistes is the poem's central focus, but it is not a mawkishly sentimental encounter: Skiageneia's 'wan smile' and 'wonderful voice' suggest an uneroticised physicality, rejoicing in simple earthly pleasure as opposed to Swinburne's Proserpine. As Callistes witnesses her enjoyment of every living thing, he gradually and joyously acknowledges that the life of a 'husbandman's toil and strife about him' in a rapidly changing world is numinous.⁵⁵ Callistes accepts that Skiageneia's fate is that of all humans. She embodies the religion of nature that Meredith everywhere avows: the brevity of quotidian life, the inevitability and finality of death, and the holiness of that which can be enjoyed for so short a time.

Meredith's enabling sense of the mystical contained within and released by the everyday – the cadences are crowded with vegetable life such as crocus, asphodel, narcissus, hyacinth-bells – is buttressed by the propulsive anapaestic trimeters which enact the expansion and contraction of sound waves as intensely physical phenomena to which humans respond with delighted excitement. The sacred truth of the palpable environment awaits our grasp, in 'corn, wine, fruit' and 'oil'. The arduous work of physical subsistence, seeking nourishment from the fruits of the earth, which Swinburne dismisses with drained ennui in 'The Garden of Proserpine' (ll. 5-7, 9-12, 59-60), carries an ongoing sacramental suggestiveness in Meredith's poem (section 8: ll. 40-61).⁵⁶ Death itself, then, affirms the values of life, whereas in Swinburne's early work death undermines and corrodes all human belief. In this might be seen Meredith's mild criticism of Tennyson, who, instead of extolling the copious holy material of the sublunary world, sought a means of transcending it, to save the human spirit from the crushing certainty of extinction. Meredith's intensely celebratory secular vision repudiates winsome nostalgia, and affords a more bracing mode of resistance to the tenor of Swinburne's Proserpine lyrics.

⁵⁵ Meredith, 'The Day of the Daughter of Hades', in *The Poems of George Meredith*, ed. by Phyllis B. Bartlett (London: Yale University Press, 1978), I, pp. 221-38. Meredith's use of antimetabole here glorifies the energy and appetite that propels unceasing labour. By contrast, Swinburne in 'The Garden of Proserpine' presents a speaker alien from 'reaping folk and sowing' (6), and elsewhere uses antimetabole to manifest the pointlessness of ordinary human labour: 'While day sows night and night sows day for seed'.

⁵⁶ George Meredith's later poem 'The Appeasement of Demeter' (1887) dwells on the sterility caused by Demeter's famine.

V

Tennyson refined his own response to the Swinburnian cult of Proserpine as 'Fatal Woman' in his late poetic monologue 'Demeter and Persephone' (1889), dedicated to the Professor of Greek R. C. Jebb, who had provided him with classical sources for the poem.⁵⁷ For many commentators, 'Demeter and Persephone' is viewed not only as Tennyson's last classical monologue (he was eighty years old when the poem was published), but also as a plangent coda to his dramatic monologues.⁵⁸ Tennyson, whose attitude to Swinburne was an uneasy blend of haughty disdain, intense artistic competitiveness, and wonder at his younger rival's dazzling technical expertise, counters and strives to rectify what he regards as Swinburne's uncompromisingly anti-Christian treatment of the myth.⁵⁹ The story of Persephone's exile had been familiar to Tennyson since his childhood, long before Swinburne drafted his Proserpine lyrics.⁶⁰ Tennyson had translated part of Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae*,⁶¹ and the myth resurfaced in

⁵⁷ These sources were Ovid, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and Claudian, *On the Rape of Proserpina*. See A. A. Markley, *Stateliest Measures: Tennyson and the Literature of Greece and Rome* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

⁵⁸ Tennyson, 'Demeter and Persephone', in *Poems*, ed. by Christopher Ricks, 3 vols (Harlow, Essex: Longmans, 1987), III, pp. 164-69.

⁵⁹ For an overview of Tennyson's reactions to Swinburne, see Kerry McSweeney, *Tennyson and Swinburne as Romantic Naturalists* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 4-5. David G. Riede discusses in broad terms Swinburne's repudiation of Tennyson and other Victorian poets as models for his own verse and his consequent turn to the Romantics in 'Swinburne and Romantic Authority', in *The Whole Music of Passion: New Essays on Swinburne*, ed. by Rikky Rooksby and Nicholas Shrimpton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1993), pp. 22-39.

⁶⁰ Swinburne had once remarked that Tennyson was a church into which 'we were all in my time born and baptised'. See *The Swinburne Letters*, ed. by Cecil Y. Lang, I, p. 97. However, the statement is not completely straightforward. Swinburne disavowed the faith of his literal 'baptism' as he was to chafe against his poetic inheritance, given that 'The Triumph of Time' (1866) may be a riposte to 'Locksley Hall'. Philip L. Elliot contends that Swinburne is here 'obliquely reading the older poet a lesson'. See 'No Friends of Roses: Tennyson, Swinburne, and the Sad Young Man', *Victorian Poetry*, 35 (1996), 98. Swinburne's 'Prelude' to *Tristram of Lyonesse* is a stern rebuke to Tennyson for his manipulation of the same story a year earlier in 'The Last Tournament' (1871) from *The Idylls of the King* (1851-91), and both *Under the Microscope* (1872) and *Tennyson and Musset* (1881) questioned the success of the entire volume which Swinburne, though not entirely spitefully, referred to as 'Morte d'Albert'. See *Swinburne Replies: Notes on Poems and Reviews, Under the Microscope, Dedictory Epistle*, ed. by Clyde K. Hyder (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. 56.

⁶¹ Tennyson took care to preserve this school exercise written in heroic couplets before his fourteenth year. He finished only the first 90 lines of the three-book epic.

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myriad allusions and similes from *The Lover's Tale* (1828) onwards, though emphasis is on heterosexual love rather than on immortality.⁶²

Critical debate of Tennyson's version of the Persephone myth tends to view the flower maiden as a figure for the poet's impatient creative personality. G. Robert Stange sees her as Tennyson's articulation of the qualities cherished by the artist – imperial, dispassionate and moving between the divided and distinguished worlds of concrete forms and visionary splendour.⁶³ However, Tennyson's Persephone is not so much a symbol for a largely untapped wellspring of artistic vigour as the distilled essence of a barely remembered history that the mature, chastened artist tries to resuscitate. His many expressions of craving for such an ideal heritage generally reveals strong affinities between the flower maiden, her bucolic playground, and the fecund countryside whose contours signify the vanished world of a magisterial past.⁶⁴ In a letter Tennyson described this association between a pastoral locale and a condition of life far removed from the exigencies of an unlovely modernity:

dim mystic sympathies with tree and hill reaching far back into childhood. A known landscape is to me an old friend, that continually talks to me of my own youth and half-forgotten things, and indeed does more for me than many an old friend that I know. An old park is my delight, and I could tumble about in it forever.⁶⁵

In pointed contrast to Swinburne's Proserpine, who guards a nebulous, inchoate, and shadowy domain, Tennyson reinvents the goddess so that she gives anthropomorphic form to the rural 'parks' of a limpid, crisply structured, and unclouded past. Tennyson's Persephone, with her own sacred vale of Enna, is the presiding spirit for 'tree' and 'hill'. She beckons the adult poet, disenchanted with the vistas of a blighted present, into a serene visionary state, implying the child's attainment of rapt harmony with a

⁶² *The Lover's Tale* offers a version of the Persephone theme through a depiction of the natural pair Camilla and Julian, for whose love the Enna-like pastoral landscape provides the special scene.

⁶³ For Stange, the subterranean journey to Hades represents 'the poet's penetration of the realm of the imagination, the forbidden region of shadows which must be entered before the highest beauty or the highest meaning of experience may be perceived.' See G. Robert Stange, 'Tennyson's Mythology: A Study of *Demeter and Persephone*', *ELH*, 31 (1954), 74. See also E. D. H. Johnson, *The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).

⁶⁴ In one of his few surviving letters to Emily Sellwood, Tennyson explains that, 'to me the far-off world seems nearer than the present, for in the present is always something unreal and indistinct, but the other seems a good solid planet, rolling round its green hills and paradises to the harmony of steadfast laws'. Letters to Emily Sellwood, 1838-40, quoted in Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son*, 2 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1897), I, pp. 171-72.

⁶⁵ Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, I, 171-72.

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natural milieu.⁶⁶ Tennyson's Persephone is interchangeable with her environment so that the mere imprint of her foot can restore verdure that had seemed dreary and parched while she was incarcerated in Hades: 'See', cries Demeter, 'thy foot has touched it; all the space / Of black earth-baldness clothes itself afresh' (ll. 48-49).⁶⁷

Tennyson, like Meredith, elaborates the shock and mourning of a mother bereaved of her child and her joy at their reunion. The monologue reveals little about the psychology of Aidoneus (Pluto/Dis) himself, or whether the underworld approximates to the creative unconscious. Instead of depicting the suddenness and brutality of Persephone's transition to the world below, Tennyson reduces the maiden to a 'dazed and dumb' cipher at the hands of Aidoneus, glossing over the sojourn in Hades as an intermission of existential emptiness, an energy sink. It was Demeter alone for whom the poem was originally named and who gave Tennyson occasion to write the monologue in the first place (she was, he said, 'one of the most beautiful types of motherhood').⁶⁸

Although Demeter has been construed as the surrogate spirit for the poet himself, Tennyson, while conveying the deity's thought-patterns in response to the rupture, is not so preoccupied by rendering her rhythms of consciousness.⁶⁹ Demeter's utterance is aimed, not inward, but towards her daughter and functions primarily as a past-tense narrative of events that have occurred in Persephone's bitter absence. The mythic structure becomes a domestic drama of the hearth, and though a goddess, Demeter loses none of the mother's implacable intensity.⁷⁰ Tennyson filters her passion through the

⁶⁶ Tennyson's symbolic pastoral is frequently connected with landscapes of classical mythology. His concept of a personal golden age in the remote past found a fitting symbolism in the untainted landscape of classical writers. See for instance the stark contrast between the lush pastoral of the first 'Oenone' and the mountains of its sequel; the Lotos-Eaters' ability to differentiate between memories cherished in the sensuous immediacy of a faraway land and the biting realities of their home; the Hesperian garden, an enclave of ancient wisdom within the drably mercantile present.

⁶⁷ The story of Demeter's grief furnished Tennyson with a complex archetype for his sense of past and present, embodied from the earliest verse in dual landscapes, the pastoral of a disappeared heritage and the dreary wasteland of the present imbuing 'Ulysses', 'Tithonus' and 'The Death of Oenone'.

⁶⁸ See Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, II, 364.

⁶⁹ Christine Gallant, 'Tennyson's Use of the Nature Goddess in "The Hesperides", "Tithonus", and "Demeter and Persephone"', *Victorian Poetry*, 14 (1976), 155-60; Ramsey H. Fowler, 'Tennyson's "Demeter and Persephone": New Poem, New Myth', *Interpretations: Studies in Language and Literature*, 7 (1975), 22-29.

⁷⁰ While Tennyson follows the basic story line of the Homeric myth, he makes two fundamental changes: Demeter rejects the Olympian gods, foreshadowing the reign of 'kindlier Gods' (l. 29), and she learns about Persephone's abduction from the god of dreams, who appears before her in Persephone's 'likeness' – informing her that Zeus and the King of the Dead have determined that Persephone will be 'forevermore / The Bride of Darkness' (ll. 98-99).

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decorous, dignified restraint befitting the august authority of a deity, rather than hinting at any feral resolve to protect a defenceless child, the seed life full of potential that is not to be cut down by premature death. '[I] heard / The murmur of their temples chanting me, / Me, me, the desolate Mother!' The repetition of 'me' suggests a rising emotional gradient, but only in the context of the worship accorded to Demeter as her natural right and privilege.

The mythical archetype gave Tennyson a structural principle that resonated with his private obsessions, allowing him to explore an initial age of prelapsarian tranquillity in which Persephone plays in the fields, symbolising continuity and simple wisdom; a second, visionary stage, reflecting the emergence of Hades and the abduction of the flower maiden that separates two time periods, one of innocent delight in felt sensation to poisoned realisation; a third stage, in which the world languishes in a bleakly monotonous wasteland; and finally, a partial restoration of equilibrium as mother and daughter are reunited, though shadowed by the dark knowledge that anarchic energies could recrudescence at any moment.

Tennyson challenges Swinburne's poetic strategies by depicting Christianity as a 'superior' theology to paganism because of its relation to the account of a mother's love so resonant it could compel a profound alteration in the divine order. Though Tennyson reacts to the myth as an evocative, female-centred text, he converts the jarring details of abduction, rape, and bereavement into a measured Christianised hymn venerating Demeter as the archangel of the house. His analysis anticipates Robert Bridges, who in 1904 wrote the masque *Demeter*, specifically honouring the traditional feminine roles to be fostered by inaugurating a new building at the Somerville College for women. In his youthful translation of Claudian, Tennyson elaborated the cosmic and geological convulsions induced by the rape, with seas displaced and volcanoes erupting.

Tennyson's softening of the apocalyptic upheaval triggered by the incursion of Aidoneus clashes with Helen Hunt Jackson's poem 'Demeter' in *Verses* (1888) which renders the myth as a 'legend of foul shame to motherhood!' because the earth-goddess was willing to blight the landscape into 'a fruitless fallow' (l. 116), sacrificing other children in frenzied pursuit of her own.⁷¹ Tennyson's conception of Demeter, whose domesticity and deity are inextricably intertwined, deploys many conventional traits in the cultural construction of late-Victorian femininity. Her domestic role of mother is ennobled by her deity and her deity modified and made approachable through her solicitude and envy, while searching for her 'lost' daughter, of 'human wives, and nested birds, / Yea, the cubb'd lioness' (ll. 52-3). Demeter's mothering is twofold here: presiding both over her daughter

⁷¹ Helen Hunt Jackson, 'Demeter', in *Verses* (Boston: Roberts, 1888), p. 181.

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and the rich profusion of the 'olive-yard and vine / And golden grain' (ll. 108-9). Although intimately concerned with flora and its fruits, she is less a goddess of raw uncultivated nature than of what could be consciously planted and deliberately grown, tended, and harvested, both for food and for spiritual offerings.⁷²

This portrayal may have been shaped by Jane Ellen Harrison's assessment of Demeter in 1883 not as a goddess primarily of agricultural fertility, but related to the essentially domestic sphere of female generation, whose kindly maternity is linked with hearth, hymen, and housework. She is, as Pater relates, 'the deity of the discretion of wives' (GS, p. 108):

because she is the goddess of hearth and home, of order and custom, she is above all things friend and helper of housewives, of women who rule in the home. She is the goddess of marriage, the patron deity of civilised custom.⁷³

As Harrison would later stress in her *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, the classical Demeter was unmarried despite liaisons (sometimes forced liaisons) with Zeus, Iasion, and Poseidon.⁷⁴

Tennyson's monologue upholds liberal Christian doctrine by replacing Swinburne's foreboding concept of a desiccated physical locale with a fierce commitment to natural process as richly regenerative, symbolising the agnostic's hesitant yet heartfelt hope of resurrection.⁷⁵ Tennyson avoids Meredith's ebullient poetic, fizzing with concrete living activity, and supplies instead a blurred world of recurring doubts, 'clouded memories' and

⁷² As goddess of agriculture, Demeter was related especially to the fruitfulness of the cultivated field and the harvest. Her Roman name, Ceres, is the basis of our word cereal, and all cereal products (such as bread) and cereal spirits (e.g. the earliest form of Dionysus as beer god) were connected with her.

⁷³ See Harrison, 'Greek Myths in Greek Art III: Demeter', *Magazine of Art*, 6 (London: Cassell, 1883), p. 149.

⁷⁴ The pervasive naturalisation of women, and the importance of this construction to the dichotomising of gender, is captured by Havelock Ellis at the turn of the century: 'women are for men the embodiments of the restful responsiveness of Nature. To every man [...] the woman whom he loves is as the Earth.' See Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study of Secondary Sexual Characteristics* (London: Walter Scott, 1894), p. 461.

⁷⁵ Swinburne was often assessed in relation to Tennyson. William Michael Rossetti thought that the 'only work which could plausibly be pitted against *Atalanta* [...] is Tennyson's *In Memoriam*'. See W. M. Rossetti's preface to *Poems and Ballads* (1866) in *The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Hyder, p. 60. Alfred Austin, who would in due course follow Tennyson as Laureate, remarked in July 1869: 'we must grapple still more closely with the relations existing between the muse of Mr. Tennyson and the muse of Mr. Swinburne, inasmuch as in giving a serious account of the "Poetry of the Period", almost everything turns upon it'. Alfred Austin, in *Temple Bar* (July 1869), reprinted in *The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Hyder, p. 99. With the history of Victorian poetry apparently dependent upon the relationship between Swinburne and Tennyson, Austin insisted on their public conjunction as a measure of the age.

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distracting 'dreams' that superficially resembles Swinburne's 'Proserpine' lyrics. A 'swimming fleece of winter grey' (l. 20) at first shrouds the upper world when Persephone rises at the dawn; Hades, 'the shadowy warrior' (l. 150) emerges in a 'drift of flickering spectres' (ll. 26-7), and his chariot leaves a geological scar, 'one black blur of earth / Left by that closing chasm' (ll. 37-8); at the end Demeter hopes that her daughter will 'see no more' the 'dimly-glimmering lawns' of Hades' realm (l. 148). As in Swinburne's 'Garden of Proserpine', the outlines of shapes are shifting, ominous, uneasy; even the Fates cannot respond positively to Demeter's tormented queries '[w]here is my loved one?' and moan '[w]e know not' (ll. 61, 66, 84-6). Demeter learns of her daughter's fate only through a vision, in which Persephone's 'shadow' wails that 'Bright and Dark' have made her 'the Bride of Darkness' (ll. 90-99).⁷⁶ By referring to 'Bright and Dark' instead of 'Zeus and Hades', Tennyson, at least on a cursory analysis, seems to pursue the Swinburnian tactic of transforming the myriad tangible associations of Persephone's subterranean story into a brittle, bewildering abstraction.

It is only when Persephone makes her return to 'the glad [...] air' (l. 45) of the surface world that physical terrain shimmers with rejuvenated vivacity: the 'field of Enna, now once more ablaze / With flowers that brighten' as her 'footstep falls' (ll. 35-6); a 'sudden nightingale', seeing Persephone's emergence, flashes into 'a frolic of song / And welcome' (ll. 11-13), and the mother regards her daughter's restoration ('Thine eyes / Again were human-godlike') as the eternal promise of Christian transfiguration (ll. 11-13, 19-21, 135-47). Tennyson's Demeter denotes not so much a self-assured and clear-sighted Church, but a pagan deity whose cadence is modified by the self-

⁷⁶ The 'Bride of Darkness' is an allusion to Ovid's myth of Ceyx and Alcyone in the *Metamorphoses*. In this myth, Ceyx, a king in Thessaly, decides he must take a perilous journey across the sea, leaving his beloved wife Alcyone behind. Ceyx is killed in a storm, and Juno, queen of the gods, causes Morpheus, the god of dreams, to appear before the slumbering Alcyone in the 'likeness' of her dead husband, who tells her that he has died (ll. 651-70). Tennyson's poem and Ovid's myth coincide on two pivotal points: the god of dreams appears to a distraught woman in the form of the loved one, who then informs her that she (he) is dead. (Tennyson underscores the allusion to Ovid by introducing the god of dreams by comparing him to 'the likeness of a dying man' (ll. 87, 89). Tennyson alludes to the Ovidian myth within the Homeric myth that he transforms, and the allusion highlights the distinction between the Ovidian gods and Tennyson's transformed pagan gods. For instance, in the *Metamorphoses*, Juno and the gods are sympathetic figures: Juno, through the god of dreams, informs Alcyone what has happened, and the gods, taking pity on the two, revive Ceyx and change both lovers into birds, reuniting husband and wife. In Tennyson's poem, however, the god of dreams informs Demeter that the two fraternal gods have orchestrated the rape of Persephone, and this revelation causes Demeter to reject the Olympian gods for 'kindlier Gods' who will some day replace them. Tennyson uses Ovid to transmute the Homeric myth into a new reading that prefigures the coming of Christianity. His allusion to Ovid's myth modifies the Demeter myth and initiates the goddess's subsequent prophecy that pagan darkness will blossom into Christian light.

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scrutinising theological speculations of a nineteenth-century agnostic, beleaguered by nagging doubts about the problems of sudden, senseless loss and the imperfect capacity of imagination to hold onto the deceased in memory.⁷⁷ Tennyson's Demeter impatiently repudiates the deities she knows because of their suspect morality (ll. 127-34), and grieves at her own failure to locate a convincing and authoritative gloss on the theological issues that continually vex her (ll. 59-86).

What Demeter craves most she can only refer to as a mysterious 'Light' that irradiates the 'younger kindlier Gods' of whom she dreams (ll. 136, 129) and that will bring her into union with all she loves. When these more temperate and merciful 'Gods' have ousted such violently erratic deities as Zeus and Hades, then, she hopes, her daughter will 'dwell the whole bright year with' her, receiving together the 'worship which is Love' (l. 147), rather than the 'worship which is Fear' of which Persephone is the tragic victim as 'Queen of Death' (l. 141). Tennyson does not portray Demeter as one of the divinities to be displaced; as earth-goddess she will simply come under Christ's ineffably generous protection, her world illuminated by His victory over the 'sunless halls of Hades' (l. 134).⁷⁸ Yet the sacramental vision itself is beyond Demeter's scope; she has no justification for her buoyant augury, preferring to extract the most cheerful message from the gnostic utterance of the Fates, that '[t]here is a Fate beyond us' (l. 86).

As a mother-goddess, Tennyson's Demeter is caught between the gravitational pull of a painful past and its sobering lesson that Persephone will be stolen from her again, and her vision of a loftier regime that is not yet accomplished. But the presence of the god of death and his incursion reminds Demeter that her surface world of apparent orderliness, plenitude, and harmony only holds in abeyance much more formidable forces of mortality, lawless caprice, dissolution, and benighted vision. Hence most of her monologue is couched in the past tense and ends in the future tense, revealing the world of the dead that Demeter has transcended but cannot make disappear altogether. The few lines in the present tense all imply her apprehensive, fretful placement between the history she seeks to cleanse of hurt and the future she cannot yet savour with unbridled confidence: 'I feel

⁷⁷ The poem shifts towards a conviction that it is, according to the agnostic theology of H. D. Mansel, our duty to show faith in a God who is not only unfathomably remote from human affairs but actually inconceivable. See W. David Shaw, *The Lucid Veil: Poetic Truth in the Victorian Age* (London: Athlone, 1987), p. 124.

⁷⁸ That Demeter functions almost exclusively as a mouthpiece for Tennyson's Christian hope for redemption and spiritual rebirth, is central to nearly all the early critical readings of the poem: see Ward Hellstrom, *On the Poems of Tennyson* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972), pp. 142-43; Kissane, 'Victorian Mythology', p. 27; Curtis Dahl, 'A Double Frame for Tennyson's Demeter?', *Victorian Studies*, 2 (1958), 361-62.

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the deathless heart of motherhood / Within me shudder, lest the naked glebe / Should yawn once more' (ll. 41-43); '[y]et I, Earth-Goddess, am but ill-content / With them, who still are highest' (ll. 126-27).

As Tennyson would have known from Pater's 1876 essay on the myth, Demeter is both deity and priestess. In the Great Mother's utterance is contained both the genesis and regal enactment of Eleusinian mysteries from 'buried grain thro' springing blade' (l. 144). She reacts not only to a specific occurrence, Persephone's first exultant return, but also crafts the 'harvest hymns of Earth' (l. 146) that will be recited cyclically as Persephone departs and reappears in the future. This is consistent not only with the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, to which Tennyson was directed by R. C. Jebb, but also Pater's research on Demeter who appears in the hymn as a teacher of rites, converting the quotidian processes of life into religious solemnity.

Tennyson's Demeter is a hierophant and seer who initiates her youthful auditor into a higher realm of knowledge, when 'the Shadow' of paganism might 'die into the Light' of Christianity (l. 136). Even here, on one level, she is the agitated maternal presence, suturing the gap in shared experience with her cherished daughter – even as the 'black blur of earth' is sealed by the answering touch of Persephone's foot (ll. 37, 47-50) – by confiding to her what she has suffered in the daughter's absence. But as hierophant, she is doing no less than steering the just-returned queen of the dead back into life (ll. 8-11). Demeter is not simply identifying but *evolving* an identity, routing death and Persephone's initial likeness to Aidoneus and re-inventing her as Earth's devoted daughter. This final stately flourish demonstrates that Tennyson's Demeter is mother, priestess, and goddess, as well as a supremely gifted poet, harnessing the magical and redemptive energy of words. She is the 'creator' of a monologue, the Eleusinian ritual narrative that was always afforded an intensely dramatic rendering at Demeter's annual festival. Thus the poem's narrative trajectory reflects and ritualistically enacts the painstaking process by which Tennyson crafted the monologue in the first place. As Pater asserts, the mysteries 'certainly' included 'a dramatic representation of the sacred story' and he is intrigued that in the *Homeric Hymn*, which he perceives as that ritual narrative, 'the dramatic person of the mysteries mixes itself with the primitive mythical figure' (GS, p. 123).⁷⁹

⁷⁹ See Swinburne's 'At Eleusis', which is narrated by Demeter. For Swinburne, the Demeter-Persephone myth is the public face of the Eleusinian initiation experience. It is mainly Demeter's story in the poem, a poignant portrayal of her passage from humanlike ignorance and grief in the face of what looks like certain death into gradual understanding and re-embodiment of her ancient goddess power to transform and transfigure the death experience, reclaiming it to life. It is the path her human initiates will subsequently follow, a path that culminates in a vision of her potency. But her daughter's capacity is still unknown at this point to humankind; beyond Kore's

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As 'poet' of a monologue, Demeter generates the ritual and is a dramatised 'performer' in it; she speaks so that she may both rehearse her acute feelings to herself ('I [...] am but ill-content') but more importantly she speaks to enlighten Persephone, winning her back as daughter by elevating 'the buried life' from 'gloom to bloom' (l. 97). Demeter's imaginative faculty is so sturdy and insistent that it accomplishes the miraculous feat of reversing temporal sequence, compelling a disappeared ideal back from the past. Persephone is often seen as an elliptical symbol in the monologue, redolent of Swinburnian speakers who view the Kore through the 'lens' of their own tentatively provisional metaphysics. However, Tennyson situates Persephone in the role of a keenly responsive 'reader' of her mother's monologue, listening, at first a feckless and stunned 'lost self', but steadily resuscitated by inhabiting the modulations of her mother's highly charged utterance.⁸⁰

Demeter permits Tennyson to define the redemptive potential of imagination and to underscore the centrality of memory in visionary experience not as frivolously fictive, giving at best only articulations of pleasurable melancholy, but as a formidable commemorative device. Since the world of the past epitomised in the fields of Enna is the one realm that is soothing and solid, it is only natural that Demeter's memory, the sole faculty binding her to a precious but threatened heritage, will become the key element in energising and ennobling the imagination, as it is the only way by which her mind can combat the limbo of dead people and the oblivion of defunct experience, Hades. The myth itself in Tennyson's conception becomes a hymn to the extraordinary potency of memory, ranged against chthonic forces that discourage its enduring vitality and compel extinction.⁸¹

Demeter's ardent belief in the emergence of a Christian 'Light' whose exact nature she cannot yet totally apprehend or express, counteracts what Tennyson saw as the ironic negativity of Swinburne's 'Garden of Proserpine', by vouchsafing a visionary, if halting hope on behalf of a human race with whom she identifies. Demeter's faith has been partially confirmed; the 'God of ghosts and dreams' (l. 5) has restored Persephone herself, and the 'field of Enna', 'once more ablaze' with flowers has 'chased away' from Persephone 'that shadow of a likeness to the king / Of shadows' with which

cries to her mother and only partially successful attempts to resist the food of Hades, her own gift for transformation is unseen in the myth, hidden instead in the secret places of the Mysteries.

⁸⁰ See Steven Blakemore, 'Tennyson's "Demeter and Persephone"', *Explicator*, 47 (1989), 27-28.

⁸¹ The power of memory also becomes a visionary tool in 'Aylmer's Field', since the clergyman survivor turns much of the poem into an invective from the pulpit 'in memory of' the dead girl, while both 'Locksley Halls' focus upon a protagonist whose memory of an abducted lover is so intense as to border on the pathological. The equivalence of memory with imagination within the mythic schema is especially pronounced in 'Love and Duty' (1840), a frame for Tennyson's broken engagement to Emily Sellwood.

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she at first appeared (ll. 34-5; 15-17). Tennyson converts the mythic material into a tool by which he can elevate a passionate faith in the workings of memory as the core component in a corporeal resurrection, infusing imaginative activity with an empirical foundation – palpable flesh and blood, definite times and schedules, observable alterations in climate and flora – asserting that vision is viable, tangible and inspiring, rather than a wispy, facile or elegiac fancy.

Persephone's return to Enna is proof that what seems like the hopelessly lost past can be reclaimed if the imaginative memory is persistent enough in its concentration. However the mythic story, with its rhythm of repeated bereavement and descent into visceral experience and disabused wisdom, also connotes the grievous limitations of imaginative flight. Swinburne's 'Proserpine' lyrics point towards a nullity or void awaiting us beyond the doubtful dreams of dreams; Tennyson also signifies a mysterious realm beyond the linguistic resources of his poetic repertoire to articulate, irradiated not by obsessive longing but by an undying, reconciling Light. Although faith in the power of imagination may yield concrete results, they are still subject to time and cannot give more than a transitory interlude that is inevitably sullied by the apocalyptic rupture caused by Aidoneus. From this perspective, Persephone's abduction and enforced withdrawal is really Demeter's story: it is she, not the daughter, who loses her innocence by being forced to acknowledge that no matter how potent her memory is, how soaring her rhetoric, it cannot combat the tyranny of the temporal that will bring the appointed hour of Persephone's return to Hades.

For Tennyson, Persephone's promise of a recurring spring is only part of the narrative: equally resonant are the myth's radical ambiguities that express far less consoling aspects of evolutionary theory that recur. The sinister life of lower phase in the subterranean domain that the flower-maiden overcomes always remains on the margins of the monologue; the very cyclical nature of the myth indicates that the passing of nine months will bring another period of estrangement and mourning. If Persephone evinces the flickering possibility of a gradual spiritual evolution towards some imposing Christian perception, then her cyclic disappearance reflects the chilling dominion of those corrosive and regressive energies that hinder the soul's progress. Thus Tennyson's Aidoneus assumes an additional function, appearing not only as a symbol for cultural and cosmic chaos, but for individual degeneration as well, a figure for atavistic reversion, a 'lower phase' where man is 'half akin to brute'; the marriage pact underlines the strength of that darker world within in which Persephone acquiesces. Perhaps Tennyson implies that her periodic descents into Hades do not augur progressive enlightenment, but a joyless mechanical repetition of defeat, a clockwork cycle that appears early in the elegy as seasonal reiteration, beating out the same old birth-to-death

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pattern against which nothing can prevail: '[t]he seasons bring the flower again, / And bring the firstling to the flock; / And in the dusk of thee, the clock / Beats out the little lives of men' (ll. 5-8).

Tennyson may not deviate as much from Swinburne's pessimistic fatality as Demeter's last speech, and recent critical orthodoxy, claims. The futility of human stability, permanence and order in the face of ineluctable decay may be central concepts in the younger poet's 'Hymn to Proserpine', but Tennyson absorbs Swinburne's wholesale pessimism into his own ambivalence, making both components of the myth mutually dependent and equally feasible, so that the myth can cut both ways, using the same elements to presage both unceasing dynamic progress and perpetual corruption. The myth's cyclical rather than linear narrative, in which mother and daughter separate and unite eternally in a seasonal pattern, holds two contrasting interpretations in a delicate equipoise. On the one hand, the female quest shows that loving memory can enact a miraculous imaginative feat, resuscitating a forsaken past in living, physical form; as such, it buttresses Darwinian theories, with the human race evolving from state to state, and attaining greater spiritual reward at each phase of the evolutionary cycle. However, the other side reveals race succeeding race from life to death in blind repetition that only revolves around a central stasis, and points to the wearying eternal clockwork exchange of Persephone from the chthonic domain to flower-filled Enna and back again.

The Demeter-Persephone myth intimated benign solutions to some of Tennyson's abiding poetic preoccupations – underscoring how imaginative memory could reify its object in flesh and blood, allowing the deceased to remain corporeally intact and communicate in poignantly human terms with the living. Still, the mature poet was not prepared to excise the myth's negative aspects, namely that Persephone must always return to Hades, and that the rage of maternal grief necessary to restore her also devastates the material present – heroic devotion becomes savage neglect. Demeter's imagination, however single-mindedly it tries to revivify a lost ideal, also becomes cataclysmic in its very concentration, unleashing a famine upon the earth.

Infertility on a grand scale does not happen by itself, just because Persephone has been abducted from the surface, but rather because Demeter's dreadful strike puts an end to the successful harvests a vegetation goddess can naturally guarantee. In her disruptive and dangerous wrath, Demeter ignores her sacred duty to make the earth bear human food in her pursuit of her snatched child. Tennyson stresses this wanton disregard: flowers and birds die because of her 'tears' and 'ravings'; man's food wilts because 'I failed / To send my life' through his vines and grain. Demeter's reaction to her daughter's disappearance is a means for Tennyson to explore

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the tension between grave social responsibilities and the wayward, freakish promptings of private imagination. As Demeter, Tennyson can channel his energy towards reconstituting Persephone and her shining ideal of a past, permitting the present to turn fallow; or he can disavow Persephone forever by consecrating his art to anodyne but laudable social projects.

VI

If Swinburne's 'Proserpine' lyrics tend to smother redemptive possibility altogether, then Tennyson answers with a nuanced rearguard manoeuvre against the oncoming forces of pessimistic fatalism that had become increasingly strident in the 1890s.⁸² The structure of the myth, giving Demeter nine months with Persephone in return for three months without her, enables Tennyson to investigate bliss, cataclysm, and qualified return through the dynamics of poetic memory. This complicates previous considerations of 'Demeter and Persephone' that rest upon the supposedly serene and unclouded confidence of its final twenty-five lines, resulting in such conclusions as Jerome Buckley's: 'it is the burden of the idyll to demonstrate that love can restore the self and so transcend the force of death and hell'.⁸³ Tennyson's Demeter ends by at once evoking and eclipsing the infernal realm she hates, but which she knows she is as yet powerless to regulate. She has to face her future role as the mother who will always lose her daughter on a yearly basis. Demeter moves from a naïve faith in the world to a crisis of realisation while stranded in the unfruitful present, and finally to a troubled acceptance of human mortality; no amount of imaginative endeavour can sustain eternal springtime in a transformed cosmos crafted by the unforgiving logic of time and mutability.

Although an early reviewer in the *Atlantic Monthly* found a 'peculiar charm'⁸⁴ in the Christian vision afforded by 'Demeter and Persephone',

⁸² See Ruth Robbins, *Pater to Forster, 1873-1924* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003).

⁸³ See Jerome Buckley, *Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 246. Curtis Dahl's essay on the poem reaches a similar conclusion, that it shows 'the Christian hope of joyful immortality [...It is] a statement of Tennyson's fundamental Christian faith', conceived as a rebuttal to Swinburne's nihilistic 'Hymn to Proserpine'. Against Swinburne's 'allegory of pessimistic fatalism' in which Proserpine manifests the inevitable triumph of time, change and death, Tennyson poses 'an allegory of Christian hope', in which Persephone becomes 'a symbol of the regenerative [...] force of nature that parallels and symbolizes the spiritual resurrection of Christian belief.' See Dahl, 'A Double Frame for Tennyson's Demeter?', pp. 357, 360.

⁸⁴ See Anon., 'Tennyson's New Poems', *Atlantic Monthly*, 65 (1890), 421. One reviewer commended Tennyson's optimistic pattern. See 'Editor's Study', *Harper's*, 80 (1890), 806; Anon., 'Recent Books of Poetry', *Dial*, 10 (1890), 280.

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Tennyson's solutions – and even Meredith's more secular treatment – were insufficient to counteract the Decadents who gave short shrift to these poetic attempts to battle despair by fixing upon a 'gleam' of literal resurrection in Persephone's journey.⁸⁵ Mrs. Charles Manning's poem 'Persephone' (1881) furnished an explicitly Christian version of the myth in which Persephone, returning to her mother only in dreams, reconciles her to the loss of a child through the solacing vision of a Christian afterlife. But for the 1890s generation, it is Swinburne's Proserpine that exercises the most profound fascination.

This is borne out by Caroline Fitzgerald's 'Hymn to Persephone' from *Venetia Victrix and Other Poems* (1889), a volume she dedicated to Robert Browning in the year of his death.⁸⁶ The poem signals the impact of the tradition elaborated by Swinburne, not only in the title, but also in the twilight dimness of the poem's faded ambience, in the methodical pairing of conflicting tropes, and in the sober implication that Persephone's new disabused knowledge is of lingering torment rather than of energising sexual initiation. Fitzgerald's lyric portrays the goddess solely as representative of nature's cycle and the immortal pain inspired by awareness of those cyclical rhythms. The bright melody of her idyllic childhood in 'the meadow's morning dew' is qualified and overshadowed by the insistently mournful chant of her mature experience, her 'godhead's ceaseless moan'.⁸⁷ The verbal masonry of Swinburne's more intricate stanzas moves gradually towards a sharp sense of an original loss that still lingers, a chilling absence or echoing emptiness best expressed in the silence, not of personal grief and unshakable reserve, but of death. Fitzgerald's compact, hymn-like cadences by contrast evince that Persephone's melancholy perception can infuse the speaker's 'song' with a significance that might help unlock the mysteries of a new condition of reality.

A stress on the grimmer implications of the Maid's experience informs the atheist feminist Mathilde Blind's poem, 'The New Proserpine' from her 1895 *Birds of Passage* volume. Blind's speaker lulls the reader through a traditionally framed portrait of a lady as the epitome of objectified delicacy

⁸⁵ See Deborah A. Hooker, 'Ambiguous Bodies: Keats and the Problem of Resurrection in Tennyson's "Demeter and Persephone"', in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, ed. by Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992).

⁸⁶ Caroline Fitzgerald, 'Hymn to Persephone', in *Venetia Victrix and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1889), pp. 70-71. Edward Burne-Jones painted Caroline Fitzgerald's portrait in 1884, when she was nineteen. Fitzgerald was a classical and Sanskrit scholar, and a member of the American Oriental Society. In the year she published her poems, she married Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, who refused to consummate their union. Though she received an annulment five years later, she never appears to have recovered from the trauma.

⁸⁷ Fitzgerald, 'Hymn to Persephone', pp. 70-71.

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and eerily bloodless grace, ensconced in the pastoral prettiness of an unspecified milieu. But the final two lines aggressively subvert our generic and sentimental expectations:

I saw thee stoop, oh lady sweet,
And with those pale, frail hands of thine
Gather the spring-flowers at our feet,
Fair as some late-born Proserpine.

Yea, gathering flowers, thou might'st have been
That goddess of ethereal brow,
Revisiting this radiant scene
From realm of dolorous shades below.

Thou might'st have been that Queen of Sighs,
Love-bound by Hades' dreadful spell;
For veiled within thy heaven-blue eyes,
There lay the Memory of Hell.⁸⁸

Blind's last two lines imply that this woman, manufactured as a pallid, passionless beauty, has a history of suffering selfhood transcending the mannered artificiality of the speaker's conventionally decorous tributes. The reiterated conditional tense of 'might'st have been' (ll. 9, 13) signals that she is separate from 'that Queen of Sighs' Proserpine; yet the poem invites the reader to ask what the goddess herself might have experienced before her return to the fields of 'spring-flowers' from which she had been abducted. The sudden severity of this finale, the unresolved trauma that might cloud 'the Memory of Hell' (l. 16), and the possibly unbridgeable gulf between the 'thou' (l. 9) and 'I' (l. 5) registers Blind's determination to expose, rather than gloss over like Tennyson, the jagged edges of a myth that seems to excuse unprovoked male violence against women. Ultimately, Blind signifies, we are unable or unwilling to confront what is 'veiled' by this Proserpine figure's 'heaven-blue eyes' (l. 15).

Blind's Proserpine figure sharply contrasts with Tennyson's version in the domestic monologue of 'Demeter and Persephone', a poem Blind would surely have read. Although Tennyson's Demeter is initially 'awed' by her daughter's 'imperial [...] eyes' (ll. 23-4), she tries to gauge what those eyes have seen: the sinister 'serpent-wanded power' (l. 25) of Persephone's 'dark mate' (l. 17). She also reveals that neither Persephone's eyes nor anyone

⁸⁸ Mathilde Blind, 'The New Proserpine', in *Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1895), pp. 78-79, ll. 5-16. See also the *Victorian Women Writers Project* at <http://www.indiana.edu/~lettrs/vwwp/blind/birds.html>. *The Saturday Review* praised *Birds of Passage* for its 'weight of thought and fervour', while gently deploring the technical carelessness of the verse. See Anon., *Saturday Review*, 80 (1895), 242; see also Anon., 'Review' *The Dial*, 20 (1896), 210.

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else's, have been fortunate to observe what she, Demeter, has just witnessed: '[t]he Life that had descended' – an august pageant of a world replenished (ll. 30-31). Persephone here has no intricate subjectivity, no fund of discrete experience unplumbed by her mother, no inimitable and distinctive cadence; Tennyson's Demeter employs the poem as a stage upon which to enact her own 'mighty [...] childless cry' (l. 32) and tortuous theological conjecture whose outcome is an insipid embrace of her daughter's new aspect, 'risen from out the dead' (l. 142).

Blind does not scrutinise her Proserpine's indissoluble and mystical link to her mother at all; the poem's speaker never veers on the nurturing timbre of maternal solicitude. Her rhyme of 'Love-bound by Hades' dreadful spell' and 'Memory of Hell' (ll. 14, 16) is fraught with ominous semantic ambiguity: the compound 'Love-bound' alludes not only to a husband's domineering sway ratified by matrimonial law, but also a woman's helpless reliance on such a figure who uses possibly abusive measures to assert his will. The 'Memory of Hell' seems to imply the entrapment that is a focus of the lady's torment. Blind, like many of the Victorian women poets who invoke the ancient story, exploits the mother and maiden to write incisively about the glaring discrepancy between how they experience themselves and how they have been categorised and fixed in deadening social roles by hegemonic patriarchy. Blind lends the ancient fertility deities vivid subjectivity to interrogate, even to deflate the Swinburnian approach to Greek mythology that upholds the untouchable cipher, and therefore alien and frightening power, of the female.

Blind's poem, mediated through the urgent socio-political prism of the 1890s 'New Woman', evidences the clash between the tantalising 'spell' of a woman's physical bearing, those particularities of dress and demeanour that render the 'lady sweet' to the eye (l. 5), and the 'Hell' endured by the private, subjugated female self. Blind separates the apparently joyous environment from the secret, stifled sensations of the woman who seemed at first merely a refined 'prop', or elegant adjunct to that lush landscape; the poem skilfully divorces the probing consciousness of speaker and reader from the enigmatic features of the woman's inner life. Blind is instrumental in opening a sharp gender gap within the tradition of Victorian poems about the Persephone myth.⁸⁹ She slyly critiques the whole tradition of deploying goddesses as

⁸⁹ The Persephone poems by Tennyson, Swinburne, and Ingelow were widely available in collections and anthologies, and were frequently quoted in popular handbooks of mythology: lines 57-64 of Swinburne's 'The Garden of Proserpine' and lines 121-25 of Tennyson's 'Demeter and Persephone' are quoted in Katherine A. Raleigh, *The Gods of Olympus, or Mythology of the Greeks and Romans* (New York, 1892), pp. 166, 136; the fifth stanza of Ingelow's 'Persephone' is quoted in Alexander S. Murray, *Manual of Mythology* (Philadelphia, 1895), p. 82.

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figures for the beauty and harmony (or, for that matter, the despair and disharmony) that male artists project onto the blank canvas of femininity. To restore vital subjectivity to a divinity that has little or none in Swinburne, Meredith, and Tennyson only confirms, Blind implies, the degree to which women are misperceived and manufactured in these poetic texts. Thus the need to re-inflect the Persephone myth as an encrypted, displaced, or disguised illustration of revolt, becomes more pressing. Blind registers the *kathodos*, plumbing the autochthonous depths of the earth's crust, as Persephone is dragged into darkness, in terms of initiation which makes it difficult to disentangle the swift epiphany from disorienting fragmentation and paralysing shock. This stark perception, both personally shattering and revelatory, anticipates the chthonic figuration of ancient gods in the next literary generation.

In 1890, a year after the publication of Tennyson's dramatic monologue, John Addington Symonds proclaimed with celebratory verve that myths were 'everlastingly elastic'.⁹⁰ A myth was such an indistinct, amorphous configuration that it could, in Symonds's opinion, be effortlessly remodelled to voice the conceptions of succeeding generations. This argument would prove especially alluring to Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence, who would construct entire novels around the involuted dynamics of the Demeter-Persephone bond. Symonds, like nearly all the essayists, novelists, and poets who contributed to the Victorian cult of Demeter and Persephone, revelled in the richly accommodating character of myth; that it had no definitive or final form guaranteed its enduring vitality, according to ethnographers such as E.B. Tylor, James Frazer, and Jane Harrison.

Harrison realised that the sheer diversity and abundance of Greek myth ratified its close association with literary tradition. The substance of Greek mythology, coupled with its anonymity, is one of the most telling reasons for Ruskin's almost exclusive concern with the narratives of ancient Greece rather than the less familiar mythologies of other cultures. Symonds contends that in literary works based even loosely on the Persephone myth, the recurrent narrative patterns and symbols become the ground for tireless negotiation of meaning among writer, text, and reader.⁹¹ The Persephone myth furnished a persistent focus for animated ideological debate in the late-nineteenth century, though conflicting views of its ancient history and shifting significance had been current among theorists for at least three

⁹⁰ Symonds, 'Nature Myths and Allegories', in *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, 2 vols (London: Chapman, 1890), II, pp. 196-97.

⁹¹ See Philip Mayerson, *Classical Mythology in Literature, Art, and Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: Xerox College Publishing, 1971), pp. 105-15.

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centuries before the agents of Lawrence's 'wondrous Victoria age' brought their intellectual weight to bear on the subject.

Swinburne's Proserpine lyrics infuse a decade in which classical scholarship and the nascent discipline of comparative mythology plays a pivotal role in elaborating Hardy's 'version' of Persephone in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891).⁹² Hardy's account is haunted and complicated by many of the key motifs in late-Victorian Persephone poems; in his fictional scheme the renewal promised by the birth of a divine child cannot override the suffering and sorrow of its conception. By portraying Alec d'Urberville as a grotesque parody of Pluto/Dis, Hardy illustrates how male domination in sexual relationships is a synecdoche for a late-Victorian culture that surreptitiously verifies (when it did not explicitly glorify) male mastery, and, according to Phyllis Chesler, consigns women to 'an endless breaking [...] on the wheel of biological reproduction'.⁹³ That *Tess's* pessimism was emerging as a major force in the literary culture to which the 'New Woman' was increasingly winning access is apparent in F. W. H. Myers's seminal 1893 essay on 'Modern Poets and the Meaning of Life', which Hardy may have read. Myers judged Swinburne's 'Garden of Proserpine' as a decisive response to the tormented discovery 'that the universe is in no way constructed to meet the moral needs of man'.⁹⁴ This lyric was, according to Myers, 'perhaps the most wonderful' of all Swinburne's poems:

There is here far more than the Lucretian satisfaction in the thought that we shall sleep tranquilly through the hazardous future. [...] No, there is here a profounder renouncement of life; there is the grim suspicion which has stolen into many a heart, that we do in truth feel within us, as years go by, a mortality of spirit as well as flesh; that the 'bower of unimagined flower and tree' withers inevitably into a frozen barrenness from which no new life can spring.⁹⁵

It is notable that the 'iron-shod despair' of Swinburne's 'Proserpine' lyrics, which had epitomised an alarming onslaught against established pieties to John Morley in the 1866 *Saturday Review*, is in Hardy's literary milieu merely the index of a widespread and weary 'suspicion' of deep-seated cultural malaise. Schopenhauer's 'strange, melancholy, and deterrent' philosophy could be condescended to as a mildly diverting quirk by smug

⁹² It is the early 'pessimistic' Swinburne whom the *Saturday Review* described in 1905 as 'Proserpine's especial poet.' See Anon., 'A Daughter of Dreams', *Saturday Review*, 100 (July 8, 1905), 57.

⁹³ Chesler, *Women and Madness*, pp. 240, 266.

⁹⁴ The eponymous neo-Darwinian protagonist of Jack London's 1909 novel *Martin Eden* (New York, 1909), drowns himself on re-reading Swinburne's 'Garden of Proserpine': 'At last he had discovered the cure of his ill' (p. 409).

⁹⁵ See F. W. H. Myers, 'Modern Poets and the Meaning of Life', *Nineteenth Century* (January 1893), reprinted in *The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Hyder, pp. 190, 196.

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middlebrow journalists in 1863: '[h]is brilliant talents have attracted worshippers without kindling conviction'.⁹⁶ But by the time *Tess* was published, his name was almost a byword for popular existential angst: 'Schopenhauer and [Eduard von] Hartmann are in the mouths of many people who have not read their works'.⁹⁷ Through Angel Clare, Hardy even hints how the pessimistic pose has dwindled into a modish rhetorical affectation for 'the cultivated class'. Hardy's novel signals a sea-change in 'mainstream' consciousness charted by the anonymous author of a 1902 article on 'Modern Pessimism' for the *Quarterly Review*:

[P]essimism has entered upon a new phase; it has become less revolutionary and more reflective, less sentimental and more scientific, less personal and more general; it makes its appeal to the universal heart. It is also more readily accepted as a theory of life by the cultivated class, and has succeeded in impregnating modern modes of thought to a remarkable extent, fully entering into the spirit of the age and influencing every department of literature and art.⁹⁸

The next chapter canvasses the 'extent' to which Hardy's Persephone figure mirrors 'the spirit' of its pessimistic 'age'.

⁹⁶ Anonymous review of A. Foucher de Careil, *Hegel et Schopenhauer*, p. 325.

⁹⁷ Gamaliel Bradford, Jr., 'The American Pessimist', *Atlantic Monthly*, 69 (1892), 363.

⁹⁸ Anon., 'Modern Pessimism', *Quarterly Review*, 196 (October 1902), 622. This article investigates three studies of or by Schopenhauer (and three other, more general discussions of pessimism), and devotes four pages (pp. 628-31) to comparing Schopenhauer with Hartmann.

Chapter 3

Hardy's Tess: The Making and Breaking of a Goddess

I

To the modern mind it is surprising to find the processes of agriculture conducted in the main by women, and mirroring themselves in the figures of women-goddesses. But in days when man was mainly concerned with hunting and fighting it was natural enough that agriculture and the ritual attendant on it should fall to the women. Moreover to this social necessity was added, and still is among many savage communities, a deep-seated element of superstition. 'Primitive man,' Mr. Payne observes, 'refuses to interfere in agriculture; he thinks it magically dependent for success on woman, and connected with child-bearing.' [...] It was mainly in connection with agriculture, it would seem, that the Earth-goddess developed her double form as Mother and Maid (PGR, p. 272).

On 17th January 1928, Jane Ellen Harrison attended the funeral of Thomas Hardy in Westminster Abbey. On 15th April that same year Harrison herself died. Though it is difficult to ascertain Hardy's familiarity with Harrison's landmark *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, her enquiries into the evolution of pre-Olympian matriarchal deities during the closing years of the nineteenth century facilitates a fresh assessment of Hardy's most famous novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Throughout the 1880s Harrison published a series of trenchant essays on Greek myth and archaeology in middlebrow periodicals such as *The Magazine of Art*, including a seminal account of the 'famous history' of 'Demeter', a myth that is central to the composition of *Tess*.¹ The bulk of recent studies on Harrison either debate how the myth-and-ritual school clustered around her as one of its most innovative exponents at Cambridge University; or demonstrate how her Hellenic iconography infuses texts by modernist authors such as T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf.² Few studies adopt Harrison's

¹ See Harrison, 'Greek Myths in Greek Art III', pp. 145-53.

² Virginia Woolf paid tribute to Harrison by corresponding with the *New Statesman* in 1920 to answer Arnold Bennett's and Desmond McCarthy's claim that women were markedly inferior to men in intellectual ability. Refuting this charge with examples, Woolf culminated her list of intellectually powerful women with Harrison's name. See *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II, 1920-1924*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt, 1982). Woolf also offered homage to Harrison in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), adopting her as a model for the spectral presence of J-H- at 'Fernham'. Fernham is probably Newnham College, where Harrison did the Tripos in Classical Studies from 1874 to 1879. Woolf was reading Harrison's works around the time that she wrote *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and her library contained a copy of Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1918) inscribed to Woolf and dated 1923. Woolf published Harrison's *Reminiscences of a Student's Life* at Hogarth Press in 1925. See also Patricia Maika, *Virginia Woolf's 'Between the*

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Prolegomena as a means of gauging Hardy's anthropological consciousness, let alone indicating a striking parallelism between the two figures in terms of their intellectual affinities and imaginative emphases.³ Harrison, a supremely gifted facilitator and disseminator of ideas, buoyantly ecumenical in her embrace of scientific and literary discourse, is precisely the kind of writer who would have appealed to Hardy's eclectic sensibility, which oscillates between high-toned romanticism and calm rationality, inspired speculation and dogged facticity.⁴

Harrison was 41 years old when *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was published, seven years before she returned to her alma mater Newnham College, Cambridge, which awarded her the first research fellowship granted to a woman.⁵ Harrison's section of the 1890 volume *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens* made it, according to Robert Ackerman, 'the first book of the Cambridge Ritualists, even though Miss Harrison had at this time not even met Murray, Cornford or Cook'.⁶ Harry Payne similarly avers that '[a]s early as 1890, at first apparently innocent of the virtually simultaneous developments in the thought of [James George] Frazer and W. Robertson Smith, she had begun to formulate her ideas on the primacy of ritual over myth'.⁷

Acts' and Jane Harrison's *Con/spiracy* (New York: UMI Research Press, 1987); Annabel Robinson, 'Something Odd at Work: The Influence of Jane Harrison on *A Room of One's Own*', *Wascana Review*, 22 (1987), 82-88; Sandra D. Shattuck, 'The Stage of Scholarship: Crossing the Bridge from Harrison to Woolf', in *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Jane Marcus (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 278-98; Edward P. Comentale, 'Thesmophoria: Suffragettes, Sympathetic Magic, and H.D.'s Ritual Politics', *Modernism/Modernity*, 8:3 (2001), 471-492; and K. J. Phillips, *Dying Gods in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (New Jersey: Bucknell University Press, 1990), pp. 179-92.

³ On the refinement of Harrison's anthropological findings during and after the First World War, see Sandra Peacock, 'From "Epilogue" to *Epilegomena*: Jane Ellen Harrison, World War I, and Asceticism', *History of European Ideas*, 28 (2002), 189-203.

⁴ Harrison's reputation as a freethinker would certainly have attracted Hardy's attention, as it did George Bernard Shaw's, who once fancied a pointed reproach against the garish religiosity of Lourdes: 'I should like to bring a huge procession of atheists and unite myself to Jane Harrison by civil registration in front of the Basilica'. See *Collected Letters 1911-1925*, ed. by D. Laurence (London: Reinhardt, 1965), p. 57.

⁵ See Yopie Prins, 'Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters', in Richard Dellamora (ed.), *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 43-81.

⁶ Ackerman, 'Jane Ellen Harrison: The Early Work', pp. 209-30.

⁷ Payne, 'Modernizing the Ancients', p. 188. See Harrison's Foreword to *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens*: 'My belief is that in many, even in the large majority of cases *ritual practice misunderstood* explains the elaboration of myth [...] Some of the loveliest stories the Greeks have left us will be seen to have taken their rise, not in poetic imagination, but in primitive, often savage, and, I think, always *practical* ritual.' Quoted in Hugh Lloyd-Jones, 'Jane Ellen Harrison, 1850-1928' in *Cambridge Women: Twelve Portraits*, eds. Edward Shils and Carmen Blacker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 36.

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In the opening chapter of *Tess*, Hardy describes a bizarre folk-ritual on Marlott green.⁸ The 'votive sisterhood' in this 'local Cerealia' invites comparison with Harrison's enterprise to determine Greek religion's most sacred authority in the pre-Olympian worship of nature-goddesses:

[T]ill comparatively recent times, the country was densely wooded. Even now traces of its earlier condition are to be found in the old oak copses and irregular belts of timber that yet survive upon its slopes, and the hollow-trunked trees that shade so many of its pastures.

The forests have departed, but some old customs of their shades remain. Many however linger only in a metamorphosed or disguised form. The May-Day dance [...] was to be discerned [...] in the guise of the club-revel, or 'club-walking', as it was there called. Its singularity lay less in the retention of a custom of walking in procession and dancing on each anniversary than in the members being solely women [...] The club of Marlott alone lived to uphold the local Cerealia. It had walked for hundreds of years, if not as benefit-club, as votive sisterhood of some sort; and it walked still.

The banded ones were all dressed in white gowns – a gay survival from Old-Style days, when cheerfulness and Maytime were synonyms [...] Ideal and real clashed slightly as the sun lit up their figures against the green hedges and creeper-laced house-fronts; for, though the whole troop wore white garments, no two whites were alike among them. Some approached pure blanching; some had a bluish pallor; some worn by the older characters [...] inclined to a cadaverous tint.⁹

The *Prolegomena* lavishly details the signal importance of fertility in ancient ritual and the powerful role of goddesses and priestesses in that elaborate ceremonial. Harrison posits that ritual is the key element in the development of religion, superior as well as anterior to myth and theology.¹⁰ In a chapter entitled 'The Making of a Goddess' Harrison argues that patriarchal Olympian religion suppresses an earlier matriarchal cult whose vestigial remnants survive in the iconography of extant artefacts.¹¹ She posits that the

⁸ On the topographical significance of Marlott in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, see Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy's Vision of Wessex* (London: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 61-90.

⁹ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. and introd. by Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell (Oxford: The World's Classics, 1988), pp. 18-19. Hereafter referred to as *Tess*.

¹⁰ To situate Harrison with other myth theorists, see Robert A. Segal, 'In Defence of Mythology: The History of Modern Theories of Myth', *Annals of Scholarship*, 1 (1980), 3-49; Payne, 'Modernizing the Ancients'; Ackerman, 'Jane Ellen Harrison: The Early Work', 209-30.

¹¹ Harrison's argument in this chapter relies not on philology or abstract theory, but on imaginal association. She offers a network of interrelated and recurrent images from artefacts suggesting the survival in memory and tradition of an archaic theology. An example from the discussion of the Kourotraphos, or Great Goddess as child carrier, gives a sense of this mode of argument (pp. 263-321). The continual recurrence of a single image in metamorphic form signifies to Harrison increasingly diversified and distant strains of the old unitary and encompassing image. She presents a sequence of these primary images of the goddess from iconographic evidence: the pre-hellenic image of the Great Mother as the Lady of Wild Things surrounded by fierce animals; the Kourotraphos; the dyad of Mother and Maid, or Kore; the image of the *anodos* of the Kore, a head emerging from the earth as from a womb, with attendant gods as midwives; the ubiquitous trinities of Korai in Greek cult, finally crystallising in the goddesses of the 'Judgement of Paris',

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deities Demeter and Persephone furnish clues to explaining countless rituals for the first time by relating them to fecundity, both vegetative and human.¹² Demeter, as a goddess of grain, and Kore, who is often associated with the grain itself, have, like mortal women in Greek cult, a special symbolic relation to, and command over nature. Harrison probes the evolution of the nature-goddess from the most primitive animalistic bogeys called 'Keres/Ceres', to their flowering as anthropomorphic expressions of the female lifecycle, finally to their mystical apotheosis in the union of Dionysian and Orphic ritual with the Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone/Kore. The promise of bliss in the Mysteries was almost certainly linked with the natural cycle itself, with its endless and necessary alternations between procreation and death. From the outset, Hardy's *Tess* is obsessed by an august conception of a female fertility deity, though the novel records the sacrifice of this 'goddess figure of immense stature',¹³ in whom are found truly profound and numinous potencies, mediated and glimpsed on occasions that involve a process akin to transfiguration.

Tess's first two narrative divisions, entitled 'The Maiden', suggesting Persephone's epithet, and 'Maiden No More', establish a vital link between Tess and the dual goddess. The eponymous heroine evolves through the 'Maid' and 'Mother' phases mapped by the *Prolegomena*; like Harrison, Hardy is drawn towards what Payne calls 'the perception of passionate, non-rational structures beneath polished surfaces and rational pretensions', which is a 'modernist pattern'.¹⁴ However, *Tess* is stark in its agonized recognition that the protagonist can never fully approximate to the magisterial and powerfully sexual female deities whose provenance and function so fascinated Harrison. Tess is initially seen as a tentative participant in a 'survival' of fertility ritual. Hardy brings an edgier note into this May Day performance by replacing the Roman goddess of fire, Vesta in the serial

Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite. This trinity makes clear the argument that the Great Goddess is finally reduced and compartmentalised in official Olympian religion into separate and largely exclusive roles.

¹² Harrison's *Prolegomena* argues that while myth and theology desiccated the emotional core of religion, fertility ritual was an authentic reflection of group feelings. In *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (1912), she continued to exalt the primacy of group emotion and belittle the role of rational thought – Dionysian orgies preceded and were preferable to Apollonian theology. However, in the post-war *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, Harrison abandoned the bipolar opposition between myth and ritual which had been the cornerstone of her previous research: 'It has been much disputed whether the myth arises out of the rite or the rite out of the myth, whether a man thinks something because he does it or does it because he thinks it. As a matter of fact, the two operations arose together and are practically inseparable' (p. xliii).

¹³ Shirley A. Stave, *The Decline of the Goddess: Nature, Culture, and Women in Thomas Hardy's Fiction* (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 101.

¹⁴ Payne, 'Modernizing the Ancients', p. 189.

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version of the novel¹⁵ with Ceres/Demeter, goddess of the corn-bearing earth as tutelary divinity of Marlott's 'club-walking'.¹⁶ On a cursory analysis he seems to allude to the Thesmophoria, one of the representative rites of Demeter in which women played a prominent or exclusive role.¹⁷ The proceedings of the Thesmophoria festival and its related myths could have imbued the formation of Eleusinian Mysteries. However, Hardy's final substitution of 'local Cerealia' for the earlier amendment is more persuasively explained by the artistic stimulus of reading Frazer's *Golden Bough*¹⁸ and Harrison's periodical essays, and deliberately refers to the Roman celebrations held in honour of Ceres during eight days in the month of April. Hardy registers that although the myth-making Romans once occupied this Marlott backwater, Tess could not at this juncture apprehend any mythological precedent for her life, or that the potency of Ceres, extending over agriculture, belongs to the countryside.

II

Hardy's chronicle of Tess Durbeyfield is a radical reappraisal of the archetypal pattern of abduction, bereavement, and quest underlying the Demeter-Persephone story. Hardy was not the first West Country novelist to treat this emotionally charged and resonant Greek divine tale as an artistic

¹⁵ The priestesses of this deity, Vestal Virgins, had to watch in turn, by day and night, the fire in the temple of Vesta on the state hearth. Their purity was all-important, and those who broke their vows of chastity were punished by death.

¹⁶ See William Barnes's poem, 'Whitsuntide an' Club Walken', in *Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect* (London: Kegan Paul, 1888), p. 37.

¹⁷ Of the rites of Demeter, the Thesmophoria was perceived as the most important and was celebrated in different ways throughout Greece. In Attika the rite lasted for five days from the ninth to the thirteenth on the month Pyanopion, the time of the autumn ploughing. The first day of the Thesmophoria proper was called the *anodos* (way up) or sometimes the *kathodos* (way down). The festival seems to have been dominated by citizen wives but may have included concubines and unmarried women, though probably not slaves. Two prominent women were elected to preside over the rites. Women remained chaste during the period of the festival (the priestesses at the Thesmophoria were also unmarried). For useful discussions and interpretations of the Thesmophoria, see H. W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977); A. C. Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and Their Relation to the Agricultural Year* (New York: New York University Press, 1981); F. I. Zeitlin, 'Cultic Models of the Female: Rites of Dionysus and Demeter', *Arethusa*, 15 (1982), 129-57.

¹⁸ The first edition of *The Golden Bough: A Study of Comparative Religion* appeared in two volumes in 1890 with a preface dated 8 March of that year. This first edition is the one Hardy read. On pages 63-64 of the Hardy notebook entitled 'Literary Notes II' is an entry headed '*The Golden Bough*. J. G. Frazer, M.A. vol. I (July. 7. 91)' and calls Frazer's book 'a work on primitive superstitions & religion'. See *Literary Notebooks*, ed. by Lennart A. Björk, II, entry 1872.

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scaffolding or ‘incandescent focus’¹⁹ through which to render a sharpened awareness of himself and the agricultural milieu around him. The eponymous heroine of R. D. Blackmore’s Exmoor novel *Lorna Doone* (1869) is a Persephone figure abducted as a child at the start of winter, when the romance begins. She grows up to face the threat of Carver Doone, a dark power analogous to the Underworld Lord, who tries to force her to marry him during the Great Winter.²⁰ In a seminal essay that Blackmore might have read during the decade when he taught classics, Charles M. Kent canvassed the abduction of Persephone and its re-enactment in the Eleusinian Mysteries.²¹ Hardy was alert to Lorna’s trials having the shape of a seasonal myth, and his 1875 letter to Blackmore is unequivocal in its praise of the novel’s ‘exquisite ways of describing things which are more after my own heart than the “presentations” of any other writer I am acquainted with [...] Little phases of nature which I thought nobody had noticed but myself were continually turning up in your book’.²² However, Hardy’s perception of wasting loss at the core of the Persephone myth – in which the young female is harnessed and shackled by brutally unsympathetic male energies – debunks *Lorna Doone*’s resolution in which marriage connotes the startling freshness and thriving abundance of returning life ‘in spite of death, and celebrates the movement of the soul toward felicity and light’.²³

At the outset of his literary career, Hardy speculates whether the arcane meaning folk-practices held for the communities who originally fashioned them was recoverable in a late-Victorian milieu. Like Harrison in her anthropological ‘excavations’, Hardy sought in mythic ‘survivals’ a wisdom that might furnish urgently needed correctives and solutions to his stricken sense of social and historical severance. But through the Marlott club-walking *Tess* finally lays these hopes to rest. The ‘Cerealia’ is a fertility ritual ill-adapted, even in a ‘disguised form’ (*Tess*, p. 19), to the exigencies of the modern moment. An idea or custom, E. B. Tylor observed, ‘the meaning of which has perished for ages, may continue to exist simply because it has existed’.²⁴ Like Blackmore Vale’s ‘hollow-trunked trees’ (*Tess*, p. 19), this

¹⁹ Richard Chase, *Quest for Myth* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1949), p. 15.

²⁰ Northrop Frye argues that Lorna is a Persephone heroine in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957; New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 138. See also Max Keith Sutton, ‘The Mythic Appeal of *Lorna Doone*’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1971), 435-449.

²¹ Charles M. Kent, ‘A Glimpse into the Eleusinian Mysteries’, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, 73 (1853), 185-206.

²² Hardy to Blackmore, 8 June 1875, in the Blackmore Collection of the City Records Office at Exeter. Quoted by permission of the Trustees of the Hardy estate.

²³ Sutton, ‘The Mythic Appeal of *Lorna Doone*’, p. 449.

²⁴ Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*, 4th edn, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1903), I, p. 71. Regarding Hardy’s

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ceremony has been rendered an empty carapace by time, a witness of the earliest ages whose testimony is meagre at best, implying attitudes, reasons, biases and ideologies profoundly different from our own. Through his portrayal of this survival, Hardy complicates some of the basic assumptions underlying social evolutionary thinking in the 1890s: that all societies develop through what are, in some sense, the same evolutionary stages; that the beliefs and practices of existing primitive communities are thus the analogues of those of our prehistoric forebears; and that the earliest, most primitive perceptions thus hold within them the underlying – and continuously operant – mechanisms of our own institutions. Hardy's club-walk, far from containing a key to unlock the mysteries of the modern psyche, is little more than a jejune and pitiable irrelevancy.

From a strictly anthropological perspective then, the club-walk may appear, in the words of one late-Victorian antiquary, 'as lifeless now as the fossil shells on the shore of some ancient coral sea'.²⁵ Not even Hardy's capricious visual angles can animate the traditional parade, in which genuine 'maidens' oddly mingle with some of Marlott's most superannuated female inhabitants, whose 'wrinkled faces' had 'almost a grotesque, certainly a pathetic, appearance in such a jaunty situation' (*Tess*, p. 19).²⁶ The odd incongruity of this aged and feeble 'votive sisterhood', to whose white garments the sunlight imparts a 'cadaverous tint', subverts the notion that the annual May-time procession and dance might be, as Angel Clare wonders, 'part of a rural idyll'.²⁷

The halting jollity of the participants harks back to the 'days before the habit of taking long views had reduced emotions to a monotonous average' (*Tess*, p. 19). Yet these dancers cannot freely immerse themselves in the ceremonial as their distant ancestors did. Certain rituals, according to D. H. Lawrence, are supposed to withstand the myriad pressures of modern industrialised civilisation and articulate experiences beyond the confines of the social language – feelings that go 'too deep in the blood and soul, for

lifelong fascination with Tylor's findings see also Andrew Radford, *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

²⁵ James A. Farrer, *Primitive Manners and Customs* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1879), p. 77.

²⁶ The women-only club-walk does have an ironic resonance when measured against the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, however. In the *Hymn* men and women are shown as living separately from each other; the girls go to the well but the adult women seem to remain at home, and the daughters of Keleos are concerned to find an old woman alone and out of doors. Even the two goddesses are represented, at least at the opening of the poem, in an exclusively female company. Demeter adopts the disguise of a helpless old woman and lives in an entirely female environment while she is withdrawing from the gods and carrying out her secret designs against Zeus.

²⁷ Joe Fisher, *Hidden Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 162.

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mental explanation or description'.²⁸ Luce Irigaray's re-appropriation of Demeter-Persephone measures the myth's respect for natural cycle against a modern Western culture and religion posited on random violence, sacrificial slaughter, and environmental abuse:

there is no question of us simply returning to the earth-goddesses, even if that were possible. A return to them would require that they be upheld, and that we establish (or re-establish?) a form of sociality based on those values and that fertility. It's not enough to restore myths if we can't celebrate them and use them as the basis of a social order. Is that possible?

Let us grant that it is possible: will Gaea and Demeter be enough? What will we do with Core? And Persephone? [...] Aren't we always at least two? How can we unite the two within us? Between us? How can we affirm together these elementary values, these natural fertilities, how can we celebrate them and turn them into currency while becoming or remaining women?²⁹

Hardy signals how a celebration originally meant to commemorate the springtime burgeoning of fruit and flowers after the winter months atrophies into a 'crude exposure to public scrutiny' (*Tess*, p. 20). The desire to re-affirm Irigaray's 'elementary values' is stunted by the emergence of an unproductive introspection foreign to the 'fancies and prefigurative superstitions' (*Tess*, p. 47) in which Tess is steeped. The failure of the club-walkers 'to dissociate self-consciousness from their features' (*Tess*, p. 20) is due to the 'ache of modernism' – 'feelings which might almost have been called those of the age' (*Tess*, p. 129) – which compromises Tess as much as it does Angel Clare.

From an early period of composition then, Hardy was brooding over how allusions to the Demeter-Persephone myth could be elaborated into a network of pungent symbolic correspondences. He sought to deepen its ethical complexity and aesthetic relevance to his key theme of the spread of a pessimistic mindset registered by Swinburne's 'Proserpine' lyrics, in which the perpetual contraries of life are themselves sufficient reason for the death wish. Hardy felt no glaring inconsistency in assimilating mythical motifs into a novel that aimed to be urgent, topical, and tough-minded; showing female vulnerability to male exploitation and to the dispiriting rigours of class convention at a historical juncture when, according to one observer, dominant modes of faith had collapsed, without the appearance of a widely satisfactory replacement.³⁰ Elizabeth T. Hayes asserts that the myth

²⁸ D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. and intro. by Edward D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1961), p. 296.

²⁹ Luce Irigaray, 'Women, the sacred and money', *Paragraph*, 8 (1986), 11.

³⁰ Charles H. Pearson, 'The Causes of Pessimism', *Fortnightly Review*, 60 (1893), 449.

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valorizes female ways of being and acting. It explores Demeter and Persephone's response to patriarchal law and power, highlighting the women's valuing of relationship, of unity, of conjunction over the separation and hierarchical ordering valued by the male gods.³¹

However, Hardy cannot secure a means of revivifying a jubilant matristic mythological language, connecting with a realm of female experience that has been disowned and disavowed.

Between the publication of *Tess* and the start of the First World War, over one hundred and twenty review-essays and articles in British and American middlebrow journals examined the intellectual sway of a pessimistic philosophy which seemed to exacerbate a painful sensitivity to human suffering. As one hostile witness declared, '[f]rom the thoughtless votary of idle pleasure to the deep thinker [...] the sinister influence of the doctrine spreads',³² calling into question essential principles both of orthodox religion and of ethics. Hardy's manipulation of the Persephone myth confronts a culture in which, according to Alfred Austin, '[t]he boastfulness, the sanguine expectations, the confident prophecies of olden times are exchanged for hesitating speculations and despondent whispers'.³³

Hardy's responsiveness to these 'despondent whispers' contrasts with Walter Pater's 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone', which privileges the ways in which all phases of the myth evoke a cultural consciousness eager to embrace and meld experience of both intensely physical phenomena and unseen potencies beyond the material veil of things. The initial stage of the Demeter myth, for example, Pater links metaphorically to childhood with its undifferentiating regard for the concrete sensuous world, a spontaneously affective grasp of both 'seen' and 'unseen': the 'mental starting point' is 'some such feeling as most of us have on the first warmer days in spring, when we seem to feel the genial processes of nature actually at work; as if just below the mould' there were 'really circulating some spirit of life, akin to that which makes its energies felt within ourselves' (GS, p. 104).

Pater's cautiously deployed stylistic qualifications ('some such feeling', 'most of us', 'as if', etc), heightens the subjectivity of this portrait of a tangible milieu, conveying a community's restive and inchoate impressions of its bucolic locale, not a fastidious empirical analysis of it. In the Marlott of *Tess*, Paterian subjectivity has descended into solipsistic self-indulgence, invalidating spontaneous communion with the cosmos as a whimsical

³¹ *Images of Persephone: Feminist Readings in Western Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth T. Hayes (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 4.

³² Louis J. Block, 'The Fascination of Pessimism', *Sewanee Review*, 15 (1907), 409.

³³ Alfred Austin, 'Poetry and Pessimism', in *The Bridling of Pegasus: Prose Papers on Poetry* (1910; reprint, New York: Freeport, 1967), p. 172.

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affectation practised by the ersatz scholar-gypsy Angel Clare. This despondency extends to the mythic framework of *Tess*, which anticipates Phyllis Chesler's argument that the Eleusinian emotions of catharsis 'are rooted in an acceptance of nature and biology's supremacy [...] The inevitable sacrifice of self that biology demands of women in most societies is at the heart of the Demetrian myth'.³⁴

Hardy's disenchanted retelling of Demeter-Persephone buttresses a social critique that becomes increasingly strident and bellicose in the mature novels, which are all fixated upon the legal and physical relations between the sexes at a time when William Guthrie's perception of 'the insufficiency of the world, and the insignificance of self' coloured much 1890s fiction.³⁵ While it might seem the myth is principally concerned with the agricultural change of seasons, the classical philologist Adriana Cavarero notes, '[t]he agricultural symbology is superimposed' on the myth 'as an external artifice. It does not contribute to mediating and resolving the conflict'.³⁶ That 'conflict' centres on certain marital practices as patriarchal institutions. If the psychology of the Demeter cult bears all the hallmarks of a matriarchal order of society, then Hardy's 'Cerealia' implies that this 'order' is not simply under siege, but evacuated of its original vitality, crippling the transmission of a maternal genealogy.

The 'Cerealia' procession reveals Hardy reacting to the bizarre incongruity of an archaic folk-practice that has, through social or religious conservatism, lingered into a new historical age. The episode reinforces Harrison's perception that the refinement of Greek mythology evidences to what degree the mother is steadily robbed of her basic potency. Demeter and Kore, Mother and Maid, were not, originally, two women but two aspects of a unified goddess, woman before and after maturity. Kore is elemental virginity, since the primal element of water had given her birth through Poseidon's rape of Demeter.³⁷ Harrison's earth-goddess originally embodies

³⁴ Chesler, *Women and Madness*, p. 29.

³⁵ William Norman Guthrie, 'Leopardi and Evolutional Pessimism', *Sewanee Review*, 4 (1896), 140. Modern critics inevitably speculate on an autobiographical motivation: '[Hardy] would have realised as he wrote *The Mayor*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess* and *Jude* that his emotional concern over his own marital relationship with Emma was influencing his subject and producing what may be seen as a "Marriage Quartet"'. See James Gibson, *Thomas Hardy: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 124.

³⁶ Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. by Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Aine O'Healy (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 58.

³⁷ See Lars Albinus, *The House of Hades: Studies in Ancient Greek Eschatology* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000). In sources later than the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, but potentially known in substance to its author, Demeter herself was twice angered by becoming a victim of rape, once by Zeus, which engendered Persephone, and once, during her search for Persephone, by the god of the sea Poseidon, which produced an unnamed daughter. In the latter

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a resplendent assertive sexuality, life energy as healer and regenerator, custodian of the household, and the dynamic force behind the increase or decrease of material goods. In the Homeric Olympus the Maid became split from the Mother and the blessings bestowed by the goddess are emaciated. The Earth-goddess's attributes become distributed among various maiden divinities (Athene, Artemis, Aphrodite) and this leads to a privileging of the Maid over Mother. Harrison comments: 'Zeus the Father will have no great Earth-goddess, Mother and Maid in one, in his man-fashioned Olympus'.³⁸

In Harrison's conception, matriarchal society is communal, life-giving, and based on non-contractual co-operation rather than fierce competition; it stimulates female creativity and egalitarian relations between women and men. But in Hardy's Marlott 'Cerealia', although derived from medieval Mayday festivities, the concentrated focus 'on the facts of fertility' – an alternative set of values regarding egalitarian love and premarital sex – is betrayed and effaced. The glaring absence of men from this lingering layer of the parochial past signals that Christianity has effectively suppressed and neutered the *Old-Style* May-Days and the Maypole, the tainted idol of furious Puritan invective. Seasonal feasts and May-time rejoicings evolved out of pagan festivals to kindle the rapid revival and growth of vegetation upon which tribes were dependent for life. Sexual intercourse between male and female celebrants in Frazer's and Harrison's research was believed to fulfil the sacred function of making the organic world lavishly productive. Later Puritan writers scorned this endeavour to promote natural fruition by a process of imitative magic as merely an excuse for unchecked wildness that had to be guarded against at all costs.³⁹

Just as Harrison's mother-goddess is stymied by the structures and strictures of Olympian patriarchy, so the 'singularity' of the woman-only club-walk connotes how pagan fertility worship based on sex and magic is ruthlessly usurped by a 'man-fashioned' and etiolated Christian creed whose core components, as *Jude the Obscure* (1897) attests, encourages a deep-seated suspicion of feminine biological imperatives. It is no accident that Angel Clare, accompanied by his two Anglican elder brothers Felix and Cuthbert, pause in their study of *A Counterblast to Agnosticism* to watch a gathering whose provenance in pagan idolatries is unknown to them, since they inquire as to the meaning of the dance. Hardy savours with malicious

story, Demeter withdraws fertility from the land in anger at her rape and over the loss of her daughter.

³⁸ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 285.

³⁹ As Andrew Lang observed, 'the Puritans were conscious that much Pagan custom had been tolerated by the Church, and had survived, not only in ecclesiastical usage, but in popular festivals'. See Lang's 'Presidential Address' to *The International Folk-Lore Congress 1891. Papers and Transactions*, ed. by Joseph Jacobs and Alfred Nutt (London: Nutt, 1892), p. 4.

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glee the irony of the smugly self-righteous Clare brothers being spectators at this 'ungodly' vegetation rite in which Marlott's maidens clutch peeled willow wands (possibly shortened, portable versions of the Maypole, an emblem of phallic potency).⁴⁰

III

In *Tess*, Hardy was fully alert to the scalding ironies and incongruities he could exploit by an extended parallel between the traditional ballad narrative of the violation of female innocence and the abduction and rape of the 'Maid' Kore by Pluto. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, by locating the myth within the context of a human world where matrimony with all its variations is a basic feature of the cultural system, suggests Persephone has no answer to the tragic inevitability of an arranged marriage that necessitates pugnacious male intrusion into the mother/child bond.⁴¹ Hardy's portrayal of the Marlott 'Cerealia' creates an expectation that Tess, like Ceres the Italo-Roman goddess of agriculture identified with the Greek Demeter, is destined to experience traumatic loss and grief; and, like Kore, in her overall aspect of demure charm and untainted maidenhood, to suffer physical violation at the hands of a sexually predatory stranger, and make a symbolic visit to the nether realm.

Joan Durbeyfield cynically engineers Tess's fateful first meeting with Alec d'Urberville, instructing her daughter to claim kin with her prosperous relative. This furnishes a caustic revision of the mythic source-material in which Demeter, insatiably angry, does everything in her power to restore the ruptured symbiotic unity with Persephone. Before the events of the myth are put into motion, unbeknownst to both mother and maiden, a deal has been brokered between Hades and Persephone's father, Zeus, whereby Persephone had been given to Hades. Irigaray remarks that '[a]s a piece of property,

⁴⁰ See Langdon Elsbree, 'Tess and the Local Cerealia', *Philological Quarterly*, 45 (October 1961), 606-8.

⁴¹ By stressing the problematic aspects of Persephone's marriage to Hades and by refining its narrative as a painful conflict between the sexes that ultimately threatens the organisation of the cosmos through Demeter's famine, the *Hymn to Demeter* contrasts with the major Homeric epics and more closely resembles Hesiod's *Theogony*, latter Attic drama, or classical Athenian myths of the Amazons, famed for their obdurate resistance to marriage. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, tensions among male and female divinities emerge in each generation of the descendants of the divine ancestors of the Olympian gods.

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Persephone belongs to the men',⁴² and as property herself, Demeter need not have been consulted. Helene Foley notes,

in the [*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*] Zeus attempts to impose on Persephone a form of marriage new to Olympus [...] in modern terms we would characterise it as a patriarchal and virilocal exogamy (a marriage between members of two different social groups arranged by the father of the bride in which the bride resides with the husband).⁴³

Generally, when the Greek gods married, it involved a goddess from Olympus marrying a god from Olympus with the couple continuing to reside in the same location, but as most Olympian divinities were barred from the realm of Hades, this meant that Demeter and Persephone were forever separated by her marriage. The myth, in Foley's opinion, speaks to human patriarchal marriage practices, common in ancient Greece, whereby daughters, unlike sons, were compelled not only to leave their birthplace but often to live at a distance sufficient to effectively estrange them from mother and family.⁴⁴ As such, Foley adds, the *Hymn* dismantles the

benign cultural institution we see functioning without tension [...] and shows the price paid by mother and daughter for accepting for the first time a marriage that requires a degree of separation and subordination to the male unfamiliar in the divine world.⁴⁵

In Hardy's scheme, Joan, far from evincing any selfless devotion or maternal care for a daughter required to enter a union against her wishes, actually connives with the patriarchal instruments and agencies that convert Tess into

⁴² Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 112. Irigaray argues that patriarchy functions to separate women from each other and to suppress the transmission of a maternal lineage. The daughter sees her mother either as terrifying, engulfing (the phallic mother), or castrated and thus cannot effectively identify with her or easily accept maternal nurturing in her pursuit of autonomy. Yet Irigaray also sees the establishment of symbolic mother-daughter bonds as essential to women's identity. See Irigaray, 'And one doesn't stir without the other', *Signs*, 7 (1981), 60-67; *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Paris, 1985).

⁴³ *The Homeric 'Hymn to Demeter'*, ed. by Foley, p. 105.

⁴⁴ When this patriarchal institution is functioning invisibly, attention is turned away from the institution itself, as resistance to the mother/daughter separation is seen as pathological and unnatural on the part of the women. It is apparent that such patriarchal exogamy, when carried to the myth's extreme, in which the prospective wife not only has no role in the choice of a mate, but also has no knowledge of her marriage until her husband comes to 'take' her, results in nothing less than rape. It has been suggested that the Persephone myth 'mirrors mythically the usurpation and gradual assimilation of an older southern European religion of the Mother Goddess by the earliest forces of patriarchy [...] Mythically, this assimilation was repeatedly pictured as the Goddess being raped, dismembered, slain by a hero, or married (and subordination) to the invading god'. See Carlson, *Life's Daughter/Death's Bride*, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *The Homeric 'Hymn to Demeter'*, ed. by Foley, p. 109.

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a captive and a commodity, removing her from the natal home and ultimately destroying her.

The *Literary Notebooks* and the *Life* attest how Hardy monitored with avid curiosity erudite discussions about Demeter-Persephone and other classical stories in the 1870s and 1880s,⁴⁶ especially the lively 1885-86 debate in the pages of *The Nineteenth Century* between Max Müller and other anthropological luminaries on the role and purpose of mythography.⁴⁷ Moreover, Hardy's reading, for example, of John Addington Symonds's *Studies of the Greek Poets* (1870)⁴⁸ alone would have summarised for him recent methods of investigating ancient and occult archetypes.⁴⁹ Although there is scant evidence to suggest Hardy studied John Ruskin's chief work on mythology, *The Queen of the Air* (1869),⁵⁰ the *Literary Notebooks* show that he did scrutinise the second part at least of Walter Pater's impressionistic account of 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone'.⁵¹

Like Pater and other late-Victorian mythographers, Jane Harrison found the Persephone tale to be an eloquent means of assessing Greek culture according to her own emotional imperatives. Harrison's interpretation of the earth-goddess constitutes a qualified feminist revision of classical scholarship, in reaction to Andrew Lang's refutation of gender and sexuality

⁴⁶ Hardy knew Max Müller's work in the 1870s. See *Literary Notebooks*, I, entry 166; and *Literary Notebooks*, I, entry 578. On Hardy's familiarity with Müller's theories see Michael Millgate, 'Hardy's Fiction: Some Comments on the Present State of Criticism', *English Literature in Transition*, 14 (1971), 230-38.

⁴⁷ The essays are contained in volumes 18 and 19 of *The Nineteenth Century*: W. E. Gladstone, 'The Dawn of Creation and of Worship', 18 (1885), 698-714; T. H. Huxley, 'The Interpreters of Genesis and the Interpreters of Nature', 18 (1885), 849-60; Müller, 'Solar Myths', 18 (1885), 910-25; Gladstone, 'Proem to Genesis', 19 (1886), 1-21; Andrew Lang, 'Myths and Mythologists', 19 (1886), 46-60; Huxley, 'Mr Gladstone and Genesis', 19 (1886), 191-205; Henry Drummond, 'Mr Gladstone and Genesis', 19 (1886), 206-14. See *Literary Notebooks*, I, entries 1359 and 1361.

⁴⁸ Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Smith, 1879). Hardy quotes extensively and with approval from Symonds. He took excerpts from the second series edition of the *Studies* (1876). See *Literary Notebooks*, I, entry 615, which is a quotation from Symonds's discussion of Aeschylus. Hardy later came to know Symonds (1840-93) personally, and some of their correspondence is preserved.

⁴⁹ Symonds criticizes Max Müller's solar and linguistic theories, and more concisely, indicates the key flaws of other readings of mythic material: Euhemerism, the notion that myths are the products of irrational fancy; the Christian belief that myths are a debasement of untainted truth revealed to mankind by God; the interpretation of myths as parables conceived by priests and wise-men so as to communicate certain complex truths to the popular mind; the reduction of mythology to fetishism.

⁵⁰ Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air: being a study of the Greek myths of cloud and storm* (Kent: Allen, 1887).

⁵¹ Hardy's excerpt from Pater is taken from 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone: II', *Fortnightly Review*, 109 (1 January 1876), 263. See *Literary Notebooks*, I, entry 305. For Hardy's further reading in Pater, see *Literary Notebooks*, I, entries 1542, 1559, 1716.

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in myth as irrational, decadent or debased superstition. Harrison canvassed the question of whether or not the Persephone myth itself is territory for the exploration of *fin-de-siècle* gender politics: in the hands of E. B. Tylor and Lang, it yields little to surprise, despite its potential, but in Harrison it fosters credible alternative visions.⁵²

Harrison's research strives to restore the legitimacy of mystical experience in primitive worship of the earth-goddess, to dissociate it from rationalism and revitalise it for what she saw as her own spiritually bereft, and aggressively male-centred age.⁵³ This is the age that Hardy chronicles with such biting emphasis throughout *Tess*.⁵⁴ From the moment the eponymous protagonist is distinguished by her white muslin dress at the Marlott 'Cerealia' until she is 'unfurled' as a black flag over Wintonchester gaol, Hardy cannot unequivocally embrace Harrison's program of resuscitating the timeless energies that underpin the Demeter-Persephone myth. An unacknowledged protagonist of *Tess* is the illuminative medium through which people and places are viewed. A perception of potency carries with it a formidable set of complications which lead us to question seriously what we are looking at or through: sunbeams (Marlott club-walk and harvest), flickering shadows or candlelight glow (Sorrow's makeshift baptism), choking pollen dust (the Chaseborough revel), and dense luminous fog (the night of rape/seduction under the 'Druidical oaks' of The Chase).

⁵² By the time Andrew Lang published *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* (1887), he had become a proponent of the myth and ritual school, which would be Harrison's intellectual home. The task for Lang is always to uncover the aetiology of myth, forever subordinating a tale's symbolic content to an effort to locate its origin. Lang tries to reconcile the philosophically 'advanced' religion of later Greece to the petty jealousies and vile atrocities of what he identifies as the savage remnants of an earlier age or of more primitive conquered cultures. Like Tylor, Lang recognises the animistic character of the mythmaking mind. In *Custom and Myth* (1885), dedicated to Tylor, Lang underscores the importance of personification in 'savage speculation' where 'all things are men and animals' (p. 55). Throughout his work, Lang shows that similar myths around the world prove two things. First, regardless of culture, the human mind has a universal mythmaking capacity. Second, myths diffused around the world through exogamy; in other words, when kinship rules dictated that women marry into tribes other than their own. By seeing women as the bearers of myth, Lang also feminises mythology in a way that Harrison may not have given due credit.

⁵³ See M. L. Keller, 'The Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone: Fertility, Sexuality, and Rebirth', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 4 (1988), 27-54; Carol P. Christ, 'A Different World: Archaeology and the History of Religion: The Challenge of the Work of Marija Gimbutas to the Dominant Worldview of Western Cultures', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 12 (1996), 53-66; Philip G. Davis, *Goddess Unmasked: The Rise of Neopagan Feminist Spirituality* (Dallas: Spence Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ See Jules David Law, 'Sleeping Figures: Hardy, History and the Gendered Body', *English Literary History*, 65 (1998), 223-57; David Garlock, 'Entangled Genders: Plasticity, Indeterminacy, and Constructs of Sexuality in Darwin and Hardy', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 27 (1998), 287-305.

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These distorting media, also apparent when Angel Clare reconstitutes Tess as 'Artemis' and 'Demeter' at Talbothays Dairy, accentuate the catastrophic consequences of not seeing clearly and problematise the mythological representation, hinted at by the 'local Cerealia', which has, in Hardy's thwarted scheme, lost almost all contact with the sexual and mythic implications of the ceremonial.⁵⁵

Harrison, like her distinguished predecessor Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1890),⁵⁶ ascribes to a theory that in very primitive societies, women performed all the agricultural tasks while men hunted, which resulted naturally in the agricultural deity being imagined as female. One of Frazer's major contributions to comparative anthropology at the turn of the twentieth century, which left an indelible imprint on the trajectory of Jane Harrison's inquiries, was his sense, imbuing nearly every myth or ritual he interpreted, that spirituality and sexuality were inextricably linked. Frazer painted a culture dominated and energised by proudly generative mothers and their consorts, such as Artemis and Hippolytus, Diana and Virbius, Demeter/Persephone and Dionysus. That Frazer scrutinised the dominance of female archetypes in primitive religion was a logical outcome of his materialist, Darwinian worldview. Harrison's account of the 'Mother' and 'Maid' divinity was established on a firm foundation of this Frazerian materialism.

It is a key irony then that while Frazer and Harrison investigate the figure of a potent nature goddess with seriousness and scholarly verve, Hardy documents a crisis of faith in this inspiring configuration of primordial feminine ascendancy through his delineation of the Marlott harvesting:

The reaping-machine left the fallen corn behind it in little heaps, each heap being of the quantity for a sheaf; and upon these the active binders in the rear laid their hands – mainly women, but some of them men in print shirts [...] But those of the other sex were the most interesting of this company of binders, by reason of the charm which is acquired by woman when she becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature, and is not merely an object set down therein as at ordinary times. A field-man is a personality afield; a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it. (*Tess*, p. 93)

⁵⁵ Only on two crucial occasions does Tess vanish from the voyeuristic view: when Alec commits 'the act of darkness' with her under the Druidical oaks of The Chase, and when she is executed by hanging. The fundamental realities of her existence, which the Persephone myth articulates (sex and death), are unknowable.

⁵⁶ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A New Abridgement*, ed. with introd. by Robert Frazer (Oxford: The World's Classics, 1994). Hereafter referred to as *GB*.

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Tess Durbeyfield is among these harvesters:

[her] binding proceeds with clock-like monotony. From the sheaf last finished she draws a handful of ears, patting their tips with her left palm to bring them even. Then stooping low she moves forward, gathering the corn with both hands against her knees, and pushing her left gloved hand under the bundle to meet the right on the other side, holding the corn in the embrace like that of a lover. (*Tess*, p. 94)

Does Hardy strive to transform Tess into a version of the 'Earth-goddess' (*PGR*, p. 272) with whom Harrison is centrally concerned, tracing its lineage from archaic pre-Homeric images of the one Great Goddess to the later, fragmented, and specialised Olympian deities? As *Tess*'s narrator remarks, 'women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at later date' (*Tess*, p. 109).

The narrator's tone maintains a riddling ambiguity throughout this scene. If Tess as field-woman loses 'her own margin', imbibing 'the essence of her surrounding' (*Tess*, p. 93) is it because Hardy uncovers a framework of inclusive relatedness that could act as a rite of reconciliation with her physical setting? Tess's industry signals that this may be a pernicious fiction to consolidate and uphold rigid gender divides, keeping the female labourer in a condition of uncomplaining, blank subservience. Tess's engrossed immersion in this expanse entails not so much a prelapsarian rapport with 'outdoor nature' (*Tess*, p. 93) – a commingling of human and non-human, animal and vegetable, material and spiritual domains – as a frightening loss or disburdening of individuality. Brought into eerie communion with the meanest forms of life, she seems an autistic extension of the fields, indiscernible and unnoticed.

The episode evokes simultaneously the image of Tess as a mystic beneficiary of animistic potency, drawing from her region a primal vigour and purpose, as well as a sense of her gradual disappearance, in a state of drugged absorption, into the vast impersonality of the fields.⁵⁷ As everywhere else in the novel, the woman pays because her bodily outline, autonomy, and individual rights are steadily and relentlessly eroded. Instead of creating a vision of a primitive deity's capacity to subject natural phenomena to her will, Hardy adumbrates a type of devouring or atomisation here, with Tess dissolving into the atmosphere as part of the landscape's pigmentation. The experiences of the 'Pagan' tribes who once subsisted on the Marlott corn

⁵⁷ Hardy's descriptive technique at this point is often viewed in terms of a vague pantheism but seems closer to an 'impressionist' or even 'pointillist' technique – something like the 'mad late-Turner' style Hardy admired so much. See David Musselwhite, *Social Transformations in Hardy's Tragic Novels: Megamachines and Phantasms* (London: Palgrave, 2003), p. 106.

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cannot be fully recaptured through the mindless and mechanical activities of the field-women because existing folk-rites may be little more than 'debris carried along the waves of time'.⁵⁸

Hardy was certainly drawn to anthropological arguments that magic, ritual and religion all evolved out of the need to ruthlessly regulate the seasons and fertility so crucial to the preservation of the species. No myth or ritual was too violently sexual for Frazer to probe in his distinctive tone of cool, carefully cultivated 'impartiality'. Frazer enquires why the Greeks personified the corn as a goddess rather than a god and why they attributed the origin of agriculture to a female rather than to a male authority. Frazer, although willing to ascribe the 'greatest advance in economic history' (farming) to women, finds the agricultural theory too 'far-fetched and improbable' to explain the Greek concept of Demeter:

I prefer to suppose that the idea of the corn as feminine was suggested to the Greek mind, not by the position of women in remote prehistoric ages, but by a direct observation of nature, the teeming head of corn appearing to the primitive fancy to resemble the teeming womb of woman (*GB*, p. 130).

As piquant as this contention might have seemed to Hardy, Frazer's rendition still confines the female archetype to its traditional position in Western binaristic thinking: woman as body. Frazer privileges myriad images of female sexuality, but he also judges female dominion as circumscribed by sexuality.

Harrison's treatment of female archetypes from her essay on 'Demeter' onwards is more holistic; she tries to sidestep reductive Frazerian binarisms by tracing the archetypes as they emerged in all their multifarious strength. Harrison is more struck by how Demeter, the omnipotent Earth-mother, or 'Lady of the Wild Things' becomes more strictly limited to the agricultural 'Grain Mother':

The derivation of the name Demeter has been often discussed [...] Demeter is *not* the Earth-Mother, not the goddess of the earth in general, but of the fruits of the civilized, cultured earth, the *tilth*; not the 'Lady of the Wild Things', but She-who-bears-fruits, *Karpophoros* [...] Demeter [...] probably came from Crete, and brought her name with her; she is the Earth, but only in this limited sense, as 'Grain-Mother' (*PGR*, pp. 271-72).

Frazer and Harrison concur so far as Demeter and Kore/Persephone represent two aspects of one goddess and that as images on salvaged artefacts they are often indistinguishable. Harrison benefited from *The Golden Bough's* meditation on the generative Earth-Mother archetype in her portrait of

⁵⁸ Stanley Arthur Cook, *The Study of Religions* (London: Black, 1914), pp. 149-50.

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Artemis, though her dismissively perfunctory tribute to Frazer in the introduction to *Prolegomena* is revealing: '[t]o all workers in the field of primitive religion Dr Frazer's writings have become so part and parcel of their mental furniture that special acknowledgement has become almost superfluous' (*PGR*, p. xiv). Harrison's first work, *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens*, grew out of her archaeological training, but it evinces that the 'primitive layer of deities [which] lay under the Olympian cult' was already 'simmering in her mind' as early as 1890.⁵⁹ By 1903's *Prolegomena*, she had clearly proclaimed the priority of early Greek matriarchal goddesses and gods over the patriarchal Olympians.⁶⁰ For Harrison, the two-fold deity of Demeter-Persephone is not restricted to the 'womb' or to her role as symbol and custodian of the grain's lifecycle:

The Mother takes the physical side, the Daughter the spiritual – the Mother is more and more of the upper air, the Daughter of the underworld. Demeter as Thesmophoros has for her sphere more and more the things of this life, laws and civilised marriage; she grows more and more human and kindly, goes more and more over to the humane Olympians, till in the Homeric Hymn she, the Earth-Mother, is an actual denizen of Olympus. The Daughter, at first but the young form of the mother, is in maiden fashion sequestered, even a little *farouche*; she withdraws herself more and more to the kingdom of the spirit, the things below and beyond. [...] She passes to a place unknown of the Olympians, her kingdom is not of this world. (*PGR*, pp. 275-76)

Harrison's Persephone escapes the Olympian 'family group' of the 'ordinary type' altogether through her return to the netherworld and her assimilation into a mystical faith that 'concerned itself with the abnegation of this world and the life of the soul hereafter' (*PGR*, pp. 260, 276). The grievous limitation of mythic female archetypes to 'domestic and amorous servitude' (which encapsulates Angel Clare's callow fantasies of Tess as 'Artemis' and 'Demeter' at Talbothays), parallels the reduction of religious mysticism as articulated in ritual to an arid anthropomorphic theology that ratified what Harrison supposed was an explicitly patriarchal, political agenda.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Jessie Stewart, *Jane Ellen Harrison: A Portrait from Letters* (London: Merlin Press, 1959), p. 12.

⁶⁰ See Stanley Edgar Hyman, 'The Ritual View of Myth and the Mythic', in *Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice*, ed. by John B. Vickery (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 47-58.

⁶¹ See Ann Taylor Allen, 'Feminism, Social Science, and the Meanings of Modernity: The Debate on the Origin of the Family in Europe and the United States, 1860-1914', *American Historical Review*, 104 (1999), 1085-1113; E. Barrett, 'Matriarchal Myth On A Patriarchal Stage', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 33 (1987), 18-37; Mary Beard, 'Frazer, Leach, and Virgil: The Popularity (and Unpopularity) of the Golden Bough (in Imperial Visions)', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34 (1992), 203-24; Carol Burnside, 'Jane Ellen Harrison's Contribution to the Study of Religion', *Religion*, 24 (1994), 67-72.

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Although 'oneness with nature is presented as a peculiarly female characteristic',⁶² by Hardy, we are not permitted to regard Tess as a version of Harrison's Great Goddess as 'Child-Rearer' (*PGR*, p. 267) when she is suckling her illegitimate baby Sorrow during the harvesting meal-break:

Tess Durbeyfield had been one of the last to suspend her labours. She sat down at the end of the shock, her face turned somewhat away from her companions [...] As soon as her lunch was spread she called up the big girl, who was her sister, Liza-Lu, and took the baby of her; who, glad to be relieved of the burden went away to the next shock and joined the other children playing there. Tess, with a curiously stealthy yet courageous movement, and with a still rising colour, unfastened her frock and began suckling the child.

The men who sat nearest considerably turned their faces towards the other end of the field, some of them beginning to smoke; one, with absent-minded fondness, regretfully stroking the jar that would no longer yield a stream. (*Tess*, p. 95)

'The worship of Demeter', remarks Pater, 'belongs to that older religion nearer to the earth' in which 'she is the goddess [...] at first, of the fertility of the earth in its wildness', and then later 'the goddess of agriculture, of the fertility of the earth when furthered by human skill' (*GS*, pp. 102, 103). The fact that women bear children naturally associated them with fertility rhythms, and Harrison concludes, '[s]uch seems to have been the mind of the men of Athens who sent their wives and daughters to [...] work their charms and ensure fertility for crops and man' (*PGR*, p. 272). Yet Hardy's tendency at this juncture is to demythologize and quell expectations that the heroine has assumed the mantle of earth-mother, what Joseph Campbell calls the 'nourishing, perfecting presence',⁶³ guaranteeing fertility for crops and man alike, for it is all a matter of perception. Tess herself feels slightly abashed and constrained, unable to mingle freely with her companions; a standard of civilised politeness and 'decency' has re-defined the social grouping so that the very concept of human fecundity is coded as a burden of unwelcome responsibility for the young single mother, and a source of well-meaning unease and humorously drawn wistfulness for the men-folk.

⁶² T. R. Wright, *Hardy and the Erotic* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 112.

⁶³ See Lillian Feder, *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 207.

IV

Hardy charts a modern female fertility figure trapped within, and eventually broken by, a narrative of irreversible cultural decline analogous to Jane Harrison's account of the 'early matriarchal, husbandless goddesses' who once encouraged and ennobled their male companions.

The relation of these early matriarchal, husbandless goddesses, whether Mother or Maid, to the male figures that accompany them is one altogether noble and womanly, though perhaps not what the modern mind holds to be feminine. It seems to halt somewhere halfway between Mother and Lover, with a touch of the patron saint. Aloof from achievement themselves, they choose a local hero for their own to inspire and protect. They ask of him, not that he should love and adore, but that he should do great deeds. (*PGR*, p. 273)

However, 'with the coming of patriarchal conditions' the goddess is oppressed, demeaned, and demoted. Demeter, Pandora, Athene, Hera, Aphrodite – all 'are sequestered to a servile domesticity, they become abject and amorous' under the 'superimposition' of a male-centred Olympian theology (*PGR*, p. 273). Harrison vehemently objects to Hesiod's reworking of the Pandora myth:

Through all the magic of a poet, caught and enchanted himself by the vision of a lovely woman, there gleams the ugly malice of theological animus. Zeus the Father will have no great Earth-goddess, Mother and Maid in one, in his man-fashioned Olympus, but her figure is from the beginning, so he re-makes it; woman, who was the inspirer, becomes the temptress; she who made all things, gods and mortals alike, is become their plaything, their slave, dowered only with physical beauty, and with a slave's tricks and blandishments. To Zeus, the arch-patriarchal *bourgeois*, the birth of the first woman is but a huge Olympian jest (*PGR*, p. 285)

This polemical perspective highlights Tess's plight, given that she is herself disastrously 're-made' by her male companion Angel Clare, to assume the frivolous and diminished role of his own personal 'plaything' and 'temptress', 'dowered only with physical beauty', as they wander in the pre-dawn light of Talbothays. After her baby's death, a dairymaid job in the verdant Blackmore Vale affords Tess a hallucinatory fantasy of god-like 'rebirth', when she is stirred by the spring renewal. In the sunless fog Clare deifies her:

The spectral, half-compounded, aqueous light which pervaded the open mead impressed them with a feeling of isolation, as if they were Adam and Eve. At this dim inceptive stage of the day Tess seemed to Clare to exhibit a dignified largeness both of disposition and physique, an almost regnant power – possibly because he knew that at that preternatural time hardly any woman so well-endowed in person as she was likely to be walking within the boundaries of his horizon [...] The mixed, singular, luminous gloom

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in which they walked along together to the spot where the cows lay, often made him think of the Resurrection-hour. He little thought that the Magdalen might be at his side. Whilst all the landscape was in neutral shade, his companion's face, which was the focus of his eyes, rising above the mist-stratum, seemed to have a sort of phosphorescence upon it. She looked ghostly, as if she were merely a soul at large [...] It was then [...] that she impressed him most deeply. She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter and other fanciful names, half-teasingly – which she did not like because she did not understand them. (*Tess*, pp. 134-35)

Angel Clare mobilises the decorative rhetoric of late-Victorian Hellenic paganism to manufacture Tess as 'Artemis' and 'Demeter'. The critic Richard Carpenter remarks,

at Talbothays Hardy shows his heroine as sometimes much more impressive than a simple country lass ought by rights to be [...] In her naturalness, in her unsophisticated simplicity, and in her innocence [...] the peasant girl is at this point as complete an image of the archetypal earth-goddess as modern literature can show.⁶⁴

However, the extract does not comprise Hardy's unflinchingly honest appraisal; rather it is the misleading and partial impression attributed to Angel Clare, whose idealistic zealotry is far from being an example of 'uneducated vision'.⁶⁵ If 'the two lovers inhabit an Edenic world' of unbridled 'natural instincts',⁶⁶ it is one conceived and embellished by Clare himself. He is less interested in the tangible actuality than in a mental representation of a construct of nature that shifts according to his capricious moods and impulses.

Walter Pater distinguishes the origin of myth in the act of recognition of a 'kindred spirit' (*GS*, p. 96) in nature, followed by the development of physical sympathy with the outer world. This is the mental attitude that enabled the early Greeks to see the 'spirit of life in the green sap' (*GS*, p. 18), which a process of aesthetic and moral distillation will gradually metamorphose into the myths of Dionysus and Demeter-Persephone. Clare betrays this process by imposing a literary, counterfeit picture of unspoilt innocence and beauty on the protagonist (it is savagely ironic that he labels Tess Artemis, hunter-goddess and epitome of truculent, sterile chastity who slew with her arrows men who tried to rape her). Demeter was also a deity of chastity in some versions of the myth, but because of her basic ties with agriculture as a guardian of ripe grain in Harrison's account, she was a fertility goddess too.

⁶⁴ Richard Carpenter, *Thomas Hardy* (New York: Twayne, 1964), pp. 134-35.

⁶⁵ James Krasner, *The Entangled Eye: Visual Perception and the Representation of Nature in Post-Darwinian Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 97.

⁶⁶ Wright, *Hardy and the Erotic*, p. 113.

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Clare fancies in his casual love-play that Tess combines the untarnished purity of Artemis with the exuberant fruitfulness of a Demeter. His conception of Artemis seems closer to the inaccurate perception that James Frazer deplored: '[n]o notion could be further from truth' than

the popular modern notion of Diana or Artemis as the pattern of a straight-laced maiden lady with a taste for hunting. To the ancients, on the contrary, she was the ideal and embodiment of the wild life of nature [...] At Ephesus, the most celebrated of all the seats of her worship, the goddess is represented with a multitude of protruding breasts; the heads of animals of many kinds, both wild and tame, spring from the front of her body. (GB, pp. 14-18)

The first thing Frazer argued about the goddess was that, contrary to Homeric and modern scholarly opinion, she was not virginal, nor was her relationship with her consort Hippolytus one of rarefied and demure platonic devotion:

The truth is, that the word *parthenos* applied to Artemis, which we commonly translate virgin, means no more than an unmarried woman, and in early days the two things were by no means the same. [...] [T]he Grecian divinity, like her Asiatic sister, was at bottom a personification of the teeming life of nature. (GB, pp. 17-18)

Frazer's portrayal of Artemis shows her as 'goddess of fecundity, though not of wedlock' – amoral, cheerfully promiscuous, confidently sexual, and justifiably so because of her key function in safeguarding the survival of species. Frazer's challenging assessment is sharply at odds with Angel Clare's superficial re-imagining of Tess as 'Artemis' at Talbothays, which insistently seeks to denigrate and devalue the female, relegating her to a mere source of voyeuristic delight, a passionless trinket.

Though there is little documentary evidence to suggest Hardy studied Harrison's articles on Demeter and other classical topics in the 1880s, there are clues pointing to Hardy's abiding interest in Frazer's wildly ambitious compilation of sexual-religious mythology across many cultures, *The Golden Bough*, during the early months of 1891. Frazer's primary concern was the male archetype of the Dying God, which can be viewed as the grand overarching theme of his multi-volume opus. But this male archetype is invariably in the humble service of, or in thrall to, a more formidable earth-goddess; he is ritualistically slain in order to engender her ongoing fecundity. Frazer was almost unique among his male colleagues in seeing that in pre-Olympian matriarchal religions, women were not defined or imprisoned by their gender roles in relation to men; rather, men were fixed by their roles in relation to women: 'she who fertilises nature must herself be fertile, and to be that she must necessarily have a male consort' (GB, p. 17-18).

Hardy implements a double perspective throughout this crucial episode: although the trite whimsies mediated through Clare's perceiving

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consciousness are repudiated, Tess's palpable reality is not. This could be a valid account of her – approximating to Harrison's imperious conception of a fertility goddess – if only there were someone to regard her without the reductive distortions of naïve romantic infatuation. The first question in Pound's early pagan catechism, 'What is a God?' is telling here: for Clare the ancient gods are merely the shallow components of his genteel discourse.⁶⁷ Clare represents a trifling condition of mind completely opposed to H.D.'s modernist project, which sees 'Artemis' and 'Demeter' as parts of an abstruse and demanding occult symbology. As Hipparchia of *Palimpsest* says, '[t]he very names [...] of the Greek gods still held virtue' as binding charms.⁶⁸ But for Clare there is little of substance beyond the mellifluous sound of these quaint and exotic 'names'.

In *Greek Studies*, Pater treats mythopoeia as the condition of mind through which the ancients transmuted nature into narrative; it was not a historically specific phenomenon, but an irreducible trait of human consciousness. However, Clare cannot perform what Pater deemed as a brave interpretive and exploratory act, the robust imagination using felt sensation to generate piercing vision.⁶⁹ Clare merely tries to recuperate Tess as a hackneyed trope of gendered rural otherness. Moreover, Hardy signals how the young man's misconceptions, and his calamitous failure to accept Tess as flawed and fallible, thrive on tricks of light. As the very incarnation of 'the great passionate pulse of existence' (*Tess*, p. 161), she must be 'fresh and virginal', but without losing the prolific maternity of the fertility goddess, which makes Tess available for privileged appropriation. If 'Nature is where you go if you have no place to go,'⁷⁰ then Clare's 'Nature' becomes a playground for pastoral fantasies that would seem ludicrously fey if they were not actually deleterious. Alec d'Urberville relegates Tess to the objective status of an instrument of erotic pleasure; while the lamentably limited puritan Clare de-realises her by elevating her to the position of visionary deity. Yet Hardy is scathing in his exposure of a streak of coarse vulgarity in Clare, the morbidly self-engrossed idealist who congratulates himself on promenading with such a 'well-endowed' woman as Tess.

⁶⁷ See Ezra Pound, 'Religio', in *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, ed. by William Cookson (London: Faber, 1973), pp. 47-48.

⁶⁸ H.D., *Palimpsest*, 2nd edn (Carbondale: South Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 72.

⁶⁹ Frank Turner asserts that among the many late-Victorian commentators on the Greeks, such as Ruskin, Arnold, and Swinburne, 'only Walter Pater attempted to provide an integrated interpretation of the Greek experience'. See *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, p. 68.

⁷⁰ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 46.

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For women to see themselves as central to history, according to Harrison, they must become aware of their own life experience, defining themselves and the world from a woman-centred position. Looking at Demeter and Kore-Persephone in terms of relationship, Harrison refers to several phases: the original bond before Hades, the experience of rupture and loss, the transformation of both goddesses, and the *heuresis* or ecstatic reunion. In the myth these stages are presented as a linear (and, later, cyclical ritual) sequence enacted against a backdrop of an unfathomably old religion. For Harrison the tragedy, as for Hardy, is that the earth-goddess who once corrected and rebalanced severe depletion or constriction turns into a voiceless, acquiescent wife and trophy consort, subordinated to male dominance, an Olympian rational totality; gaining value in the eyes of mainstream culture not from relationship to other women, but via their social or sexual connections with, and utility to men. This is what Hardy intimates when Clare fashions Tess as 'Artemis' and 'Demeter' through the prism of a trivialising dilettantism. Little in Clare's facetious love-play implies that Demeter's many vibrant facets and multiple symbolic forms are pressing towards ebullient expression in Tess's contemporary behaviour.

Hardy tells us – and not without disparagement – that Clare is 'advanced and [...] a sample product of the last five-and-twenty years' (*Tess*, p. 258), someone who has read, without fully comprehending, his Darwin and T. H. Huxley.⁷¹ He bases his relationship with Tess on glib neo-paganism, his rational faculty having 'long discredited the old systems of mysticism', particularly Christian. He flirts with the concept 'that it might have resulted far better for mankind if Greece had been the source of the religion of modern civilisation, and not Palestine' (*Tess*, p. 161).⁷² This ostensibly maverick 'freethinker', casting himself as a strenuous advocate of J. S. Mill's injunction to disseminate the gospel of 'intellectual liberty' (*Tess*, p. 121) is ironically enslaved by the drab dictates of his father's Church, which he loves 'as one loves a parent' (*Tess*, p. 120). Sharing Clym Yeobright's 'unconquerable' distaste for 'modern town-life' (*Tess*, p. 121), this sham scholar-gypsy expects he will become more closely attuned to an agricultural locale at Talbothays.

At the time of her marriage to Clare, Hardy gives an account of Tess's sense of self:

⁷¹ In Chapter 46 Tess parrots to Alec d'Urberville one of Angel's specious arguments, 'which might possibly have been paralleled in many a work of the pedigree ranging from the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* to Huxley's *Essays*' (*Tess*, p. 312).

⁷² Clare 'had persistently elevated Hellenic Paganism at the expense of Christianity' (*Tess*, pp. 329-30).

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She knew that Angel was close to her; all the rest was a luminous mist. She was a sort of celestial person, who owed her being to poetry; one of those classical divinities Clare was accustomed to talk to her about when they took their walks together. (*Tess*, p. 211)

On this special occasion, her thought-patterns evince the unmistakable imprint of Clare's clichéd culture-bound metaphors and heedless glorifying. Because of Tess's 'sublime trustfulness', Clare becomes to her 'all that goodness could be' – an index of her disastrous and excessive idealisation of *him* as the instrument of an impossible rehabilitation. Clare talks of Tess as a 'celestial' person, signifying Max Müller's philological interpretations in which all mythology is a terrestrial reflection of celestial phenomena. Andrew Lang derided this school of thought: 'even the story of the Earth Goddess, the Harvest Goddess, Demeter, was usually explained as a reflection of myth of one or another celestial phenomenon – dawn, storm-cloud, or something else according to taste'.⁷³ Clare typifies what Lang calls 'civilised fancy' that baulks at the 'ugly scars' paraded by dark gods; that

is not puzzled for a moment by a beautiful beneficent Sun-god, or even by his beholding the daughters of men that they are fair. But a civilised fancy is puzzled when the beautiful Sun-god makes love in the shape of a dog.⁷⁴

Tess has briefly internalised Clare's hollow 'fancy' and is besmirched by it. Clare imagines not the living heroine, but a pagan divinity of mannered artifice: essence overshadows existence in his muddled subjective perception. His captivating light-enhanced illusion is unsustainable, and Tess eventually disavows his injurious idealizing vision of her. She does not fully apprehend the facetious tags or her ostensible affinity with and, by implication, magical possession of the vibrant physical world:

'Call me Tess', she would say askance; and he did.

Then it would grow lighter, and her features would become simply feminine; they had changed from those of a divinity who could confer bliss to those of a being who craved it. (*Tess*, p. 135)

Clare manifests no more belief in the pagan divinities he conjures up than he does in anything else. He consistently invents Tess – registering her with about as much limpid clarity as Jude Fawley does Christminster from the grimy roof of the Brown House. During the Marlott harvesting and throughout her ruinous relationship with Clare, Tess is linked with, but never becomes, a vision of the fertility deity that was a lifelong obsession to Harrison.

⁷³ Andrew Lang, *Modern Mythology* (1897; New York: AMS Press, 1968), p. 2.

⁷⁴ Andrew Lang, *Modern Mythology*, pp. 4-5.

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The scalding irony is that Clare degrades any flickering glimpse of the 'natural' by converting Tess's physical presence into the abstract essence of a drably mythologized Arcadia, a tactic replicated by Grace Melbury who transforms the diffident Giles Winterborne into 'Autumn's very brother' in *The Woodlanders* (1887).⁷⁵ Grace thinks 'Nature is bountiful' after Winterborne's emergence, whom she reinvents in his ritual aspect coated with pips and flecks of apple flesh; a figure who not only seems to blend with, but also inherits the exorbitant, organic profusion of the region. The intoxicating sensuousness of Grace's tone is suspiciously Keatsian:

He looked and smelt like Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt to wheat-colour, his eyes blue as corn-flowers, his sleeves and leggings dyed with fruit stains, his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples, his hat sprinkled with pips, and everywhere about him that atmosphere of cider which at its first return each season has such an indescribable fascination for those who have been born and bred among the orchards. Her heart rose from its late sadness like a released bough; her senses revelled in the sudden lapse back to Nature unadorned. The consciousness of having to be genteel because of her husband's profession, the veneer of artificiality which she had acquired at the fashionable schools, were thrown off, and she became the crude country girl of her latent, early instincts.

Nature was bountiful, she thought. No sooner had she been cast aside by Edred Fitzpiers, than another being, impersonating chivalrous and undiluted manliness, had arisen out of the earth, ready to her hand. This, however, was an excursion of the imagination which she did not wish to encourage, and she said suddenly, to disguise the confused regard which had followed her thoughts, 'Did you meet my husband?'

Here it is the woman who venerates and objectifies the male as fertility deity – a rugged exemplar of the teeming life of nature. Grace envisages autumn's texture, produce, colour, and smell in loving and tender detail, underscoring Winterborne's apparent affiliation with organic processes, while rejecting his sexual identity. With a violent resurgence of affection for what she thinks are the countryman's unblemished virtues, Grace sees Winterborne as belonging to the tangible natural world in all its aspects, and attaining his apotheosis as an autumnal fertility figure. Angel Clare, like Grace Melbury, indulges 'an excursion of the imagination', toying with the notion that the observed figure (who is voyeuristically savoured) has been transfigured by the season. 'Imagination' here is not a positive, healthy sign of social integration or spiritual aspiration, but an index of the grave perceptual aberrations to which Clare and Grace Melbury are repeatedly prone.

⁷⁵ Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, ed. by Dale Kramer (Oxford: The World's Classics, 1986), p. 156.

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The Marlott club-walking, harvesting and the sojourn at Talbothays Diary all illustrate that Tess, though standing on the brink of 'rebirth', will never achieve wholeness of being like the nature-goddess to whom she is repeatedly compared. Hardy manipulates mythological motifs to act as a bitterly ironic counterpoint to the dominant strand of his action. The reunion of Demeter and Persephone contrasts with the stability that Tess fails to regain after the night of rape/seduction, when she is again wearing the white muslin gown of maidenhood displayed at the 'local Cerealia' (Tess, p. 19).

After her experience under the 'Druidical oaks' of The Chase, Tess cannot reconstitute herself in accordance with the seasonal cycle of dissolution and regeneration expressed by the Persephone myth. This failure may result from the fact that she simply has the wrong audience for the presentation of a new identity. This notion harmonizes with Hardy's idea of theatricality and genre – Tess may be a poor judge of what 'genre' best 'fits' her new self-characterization and the 'unities' of her situation. In Chapter 14, when Tess baptizes her illegitimate child with the aid of her younger brothers and sisters, she does not discover within herself enough potency to prevent the death of her baby, who is born in the spring, the time when Persephone returns to Demeter, and is buried in August during the harvest, when the Romans commemorated Persephone's disappearance. Hardy cultivates an acerbic ironic relation here. All occurs as in the myth, yet all misfires: Alec is not Pluto and the late-Victorian belief system does not brook pagan fertility, quite the opposite in fact. Moreover, Hardy rearranges events: Tess's Kore in Spring is at Talbothays, which offers only a heady illusion of rebirth, and her winter in Hades is at Flintcomb-Ash.

Tess the girl-mother is reminiscent of Pater's Demeter 'the weary woman, indeed, our Lady of Sorrows, the *mater dolorosa* of the ancient world' (GS, p. 114). However, Pater's conception of the goddess transcribes Greek religion into Christian iconography. In imitating a Christian rite, Tess attains an aura of sanctity, though not of Christian sanctity. Stately in her priestly white nightgown (again invoking the garment an unsullied Tess wears at the 'Cerealia'), the protagonist captures a magical prestige which late-Victorian bourgeois society would never vouchsafe its unmarried mothers.⁷⁶

Her figure looked singularly tall and imposing as she stood in her long white nightgown, a thick cable of twisted dark hair hanging straight down her back to her waist. The kindly dimness of the weak candle abstracted from her form and features the little

⁷⁶ The role of a maternal figure is not new to Tess. In effect she is the only dependable parent in the Durbeyfield household and accepts her mother's responsibilities when Mrs Durbeyfield escapes to Rolliver's Inn.

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blemishes which sunlight might have revealed – the stubble-scratches upon her wrists, and the weariness of her eyes – her high enthusiasm having a transfiguring effect upon the face which had been her undoing, showing it as a thing of immaculate beauty, with a touch of dignity which was almost regal. (*Tess*, p. 99)

Hardy freezes the scene in hypnotic specificity: '[t]he kindly dimness of the weak candle abstracted [...] the little blemishes' anticipates the bogus transfiguration of Alec in his 'half-clerical' garb that abstracts 'the dandyism from his features' (*Tess*, p. 297) during Tess's stay at Flintcomb-Ash. However, the heroine is not simply transported 'into spirituality, into saintly transfiguration',⁷⁷ for she is an intensely palpable presence: work-weary with stubble-scratched wrists. The 'things done' in this makeshift ritual are not as significant as the imperfect girl-mother at its centre, whose fervency fills the young children with awe. Tess refuses to let the outmoded moral scruples of patriarchal hegemony cast an oppressive shadow over her motherhood. To contend that Hardy draws her in an image of the 'immaculate' Virgin Mother seriously misreads her 'ecstasy of faith' and the ferocious irony at the expense of the sacrament of baptism with which the chapter closes.

The ecstasy of faith almost apotheosized her; it set upon her face a glowing irradiation and brought a red spot into the middle of each cheek; while the miniature candle-flame inverted in her eye-pupils shone like a diamond. The children gazed up at her with more and more reverence, and no longer had a will for questioning. She did not look like Sissy to them now, but as a being large, towering and awful, a divine personage with whom they had nothing in common. (*Tess*, pp. 99-100)

Tess's spiritual recuperation is seen through the eyes of her dumbstruck younger siblings: '[s]he did not look like Sissy to them now'. To the breathlessly rapt children she has divine status, but as Hardy intimates, her 'ecstasy of faith' is not enough to apotheosise her given the prevailingly sombre and pensive mood of the episode. Throughout this baptism is a perpetual sense of being on edge, of blighted hope and of falling back. To label Tess's 'ecstasy' as unguarded rapture or a fundamental revelation of human individuality is an insufficient analytical gloss. Walter Pater's 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), delineates ecstasy as a moment of intoxication when the body and matter of the physical world coalesce. Tess's experience adumbrates a Paterian sense of quickened consciousness, a creative augmentation of the self. At the height of her maternal anxiety Tess displays for one instant a grace that is alien to the unforgiving, retributive Church imaged as consigning her illegitimate baby to the nethermost recess of hell. This dramatically stylized picture of the

⁷⁷ Rosemarie Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 102.

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girl-mother is similar to Giles Winterborne's 'apotheosis' as 'Autumn's very brother', in that Hardy does not trace the exact trajectory of a character's thought-patterns. Neither figure seems cognizant of being invested with extraordinary resilience.

Moreover, because of Hardy's disillusioned attitude towards his own idiosyncratic mode of regard and chiaroscuro effects, he ensures that there is a thin line between Clare's imprisoning idealism at Talbothays and Tess's moment of transfiguration when baptizing her ailing child. We compare 'the dignified largeness both of disposition and physique' which 'Tess seemed to Clare to exhibit' in the 'preternatural' early morning hours with the 'being large, towering and awful, a divine personage' with whom the Durbeyfield children 'had nothing in common' (*Tess*, p. 100); the 'minute diamonds of moisture' which temporarily lend Tess an 'ethereal beauty' (*Tess*, p. 134) with 'the miniature candle-flame inverted in her eye-pupils' that 'shone like a diamond' (*Tess*, pp. 99-100). Clare's unreliable perception of Tess 'seeming' to exhibit 'an almost regnant power' in Chapter 20, recalls the 'touch of dignity which was almost regal' (*Tess*, p. 99).

The components of Paterian 'ecstasy' are also rooted in Hardy's wry depiction of the barn dance at Chaseborough, though in a corrupted form. The time is a Saturday night in September, the month of the Eleusinian mysteries honouring Demeter and Persephone. The mysteries took place during a nine-day span, beginning annually on the sixteenth day of Boedromion (around September 28 of our calendar).⁷⁸ The occasion is one of the weekly jaunts to the 'decayed market-town' (*Tess*, p. 65). Hardy exploits the incongruity between his louche and gamey modern-day 'pilgrims' (*Tess*, p. 65) who disport themselves at Chaseborough then spend Sunday 'sleeping off the dyspeptic effects of the curious compounds sold to them as beer' (*Tess*, p. 65), and the aspirants of the Eleusinian mysteries, 'the most famous and solemn religious rites of ancient Greece' according to Frazer (*GB*, p. 408). Harrison points out that though the mysteries have long disappeared from conscious reverence, the Eleusinian *spirit* does not expire (in Hardy's slyly debunking version the 'spirit' becomes notably more alcoholic); suppressed, oppressed, it merely alters forms, hides in the nooks and crannies of the new religion that replaces it, resurfacing in images and rituals whose provenance has been lost to the consciousness of the people who still go through the motions in the present, and appears unrecognised in dreams and visions.

⁷⁸ 'The Eleusinian mysteries were celebrated in the month Boedromion (September-October), at the time of sowing'. See *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. by M. C. Howatson, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 377.

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At Eleusis, Demeter disclosed to those who had been specially initiated the solemn lessons of law and stoical self-discipline, the incalculable benefits of agriculture and a thorough education, of maintaining an identity anchored in a fixed geographically and socially defined milieu. Some of these religious observances are sarcastically echoed in Hardy's portrayal of the 'private little jig' at Chaseborough (*Tess*, p. 66). The Trantridge farm workers use the agricultural festivities as an opportunity to 'drink hard' and dance. The unearthly transfiguring qualities of light which caused 'ideal and real' to 'clash' during the Marlott club-walking (*Tess*, p. 19) are exaggerated here, yet another stubborn 'survival' of primitive fertility ritual:

It was a windowless erection used for storage, and from the open door there floated into the obscurity a mist of yellow radiance, which at first Tess thought to be illuminated smoke. But on drawing nearer she perceived that it was a cloud of dust, lit by candles within the outhouse, whose beams upon the haze carried forward the outline of the doorway into the wide night of the garden. (*Tess*, p. 66)

The border between concrete actuality and the imaginary begins to dissolve in this turmoil:

when [Tess] came close and looked in she beheld indistinct forms racing up and down to the figure of the dance, the silence of their footfalls arising from their being overshoed in "scroff" – that is to say the powdery residuum from the storage of peat and other products, the stirring of which by their turbulent feet created the nebulosity that involved the scene. (*Tess*, pp. 66-67)

Hardy's archly pedantic definition of the onomatopoeic 'scroff' implies that he is compiling a Barnesian glossary of Dorset dialect. The dense, choking mist of pollen and dust, linked with volatile passion and rampant sexuality in *Tess*, shrouds the Trantridge toppers from view. That the excitations and commotions of feeling generated by the dance result in 'a sort of vegeto-human pollen' (*Tess*, p. 66), signals Hardy's ironic sense of the preposterous throughout this episode.

Under the influence of 'liquor' (*Tess*, p. 67) and enlivened by the immediacy of music as it dynamically associates bodies, the dancers feel a total oneness with nature; in the heady dreamlike ambience it seems they have been transmuted into lubricious classical demigods. By overtly conceiving the raucous rabble in terms of pagan mythology, Hardy accentuates the sense of threat and barely suppressed chaos. Perhaps, like Tess, he cannot confidently police the boundary between the 'creative' and the 'destructive' in this rambunctious ritual; a distinction between inspiration

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and dissipation is never emphatically established.⁷⁹ That he simultaneously acknowledges the resonance of the communal occasion, while retreating from the anarchic, non-differentiated intensities of untrammelled instinct, connotes a deep-seated anxiety about – even profound alienation from – the partial impression of nature supplied here.

As in the Marlott club-walking (Chapter 2) and during the improvised baptism (Chapter 14), Tess stands on the cusp of ‘rebirth’. However, the orgiastic Chaseborough jamboree is a fertility ritual in which the morally sensitive Tess cannot fully immerse herself, and she resists the affective summons. Although she is preternaturally responsive to music as a means of offering unexpected expansions of thought and sympathy, the Chaseborough episode shows a hypnotized automatism taking over the dancers and yields no positive unfolding of selfhood. Not only has Tess outgrown her mother’s peasant mentality, she is also unable to reconcile delirious surrender to the weekend debauch with her overriding desire for ethical order. The dance measure – infused with unruly summer eroticism – disturbs her: possession and sexuality merge in this half-jubilant, half-diabolic atmosphere. As a youngster Hardy played the fiddle at these kinds of country-dances,⁸⁰ often in company of his father as first violinist and his uncle as cellist. He witnessed how moderated movements kept in check by rhythmical restraint could suddenly descend into rowdy spontaneity.⁸¹

‘The choice spirit’, remarks the Hardyan narrator, ‘who ruled The Slopes in that vicinity’ (*Tess*, p. 65) is Dionysus, who was revered in the Eleusinian mysteries not as ruler but as a divine child. Harrison, in her *Prolegomena* and especially in *Ancient Art and Ritual*, chronicles the evolution of Greek tragedy from Dionysian ritual, arguing that primitive magic rituals could not have arisen out of rational or cognitive conception, but expressed rather a collective emotional experience. The ‘primitive’ celebrant does not require abstractions because he is ‘too busy living’ fully. He ‘begins with a vague excited dance to relieve his emotion’, but the dancer ‘does not embody’ a previously conceived idea, rather ‘he begets it.’ Magic ceremonies, therefore,

⁷⁹ David Musselwhite contends that ‘the novel as a whole is written as though the narrator himself is in some kind of trance or second state [...] Indeed, at times, there seems to be something drunken or drug induced about the instabilities and sheer vertigo of the narrative point of view’. See *Social Transformations in Hardy’s Tragic Novels*, p. 111.

⁸⁰ See Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 58.

⁸¹ Hardy’s technical knowledge of folksong and the decaying Dorset working-class musical life in general made him better qualified to comment on traditional music than many Victorian folksong experts. See, for example, his letter of 1 September 1889 to J. J. Foster answering enquiries about a song. Hardy also published letters in such journals as *The English Folk Dance Society News* (e.g. September 1926, pp. 384-85) and *The Journal of the English Folk Dance Society*.

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are entirely experiential, based on 'collectivity and emotional tension'.⁸² She goes on to assert that the very concept of 'god' arises out of the congregated, concrete enactments of basic desires for food and fertility:

[The dancers] sink their own personality and by the wearing of masks and disguises, by dancing to a common rhythm, above all by the common excitement, they become emotionally one, a true congregation, not a collection of individuals. The emotion they feel collectively, the thing that is more than any individual emotion, they externalise, project; it is the raw-material of god-head.⁸³

It is significant that Hardy's agitated awareness of a Dionysian revel (that has terrible personal repercussions for Tess) clashes with Harrison's more elated notion of ritual as a moment in which participants readily succumb to an overwhelming collective emotion, thus achieving multiplied consciousness. Dionysus is 'a human youth, lovely, with curled hair, but in a moment he is a Wild Bull and a Burning Flame. The beauty and the thrill of it!'⁸⁴ Unlike Frazer, Harrison's theory of magic was derived from contemporary psychological and sociological research, leaving behind the vestiges of nineteenth-century rationalism:

Sympathetic magic is, modern psychology teaches us [...] not the outcome of intellectual illusion, not even the exercise of a "mimetic instinct", but simply, in its ultimate analysis, an utterance, a discharge of emotion and longing.⁸⁵

Harrison delights in the very factors of Greek culture that dismayed the mythographer Max Müller: the wildly 'irrational' and perverse elements in the religion of a supposedly 'civilised' race as the classical Greeks.⁸⁶ Unlike

⁸² Harrison, *Themis*, p. 36.

⁸³ Harrison, *Themis*, pp. 45-46.

⁸⁴ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, pp. 204-205.

⁸⁵ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis*, p. 34. The relation between magic and religion was vigorously debated in the 1890s. By 1900 Tylor's and Frazer's definitions of religion and magic were condemned as too strenuously rationalistic, largely due to the increasing popularity of Codrington's *The Melanesians* (1891) and R. R. Marett's *The Threshold of Religion* (1909). For these anthropologists magic was not merely primitive peoples' efforts to regulate the universe for practical purposes (to bring rain or to stimulate fecundity), but was rather the expression of pre-intellectual 'vitalism', a spiritual force inherent in nature and humanity.

⁸⁶ Max Müller stripped myth of sexual significance in what Frank Turner sees as typical Victorian prudery. For example, solar theorists demurely refer to Zeus's mutilation of his father Cronos, avoiding mention of precisely what was mutilated, so that readers need not confront the horror of castration. Müller played down the sexual element, according to Turner, not only out of discomfort with the immodesty of exposing unmentionable body parts, but also because his purpose was to denude myth of its great power, to which sexual imagery surely contributes. Gory details are only the most extreme version of the personification that Müller despised in myth. Since Müller upheld the patriarchal basis of Victorian culture, he would have had no desire to express the ultimate threat to masculinity, castration. Rejecting later mythic depravity as the

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Müller, Andrew Lang had no trouble recognising the sexuality inherent in Greek mythology. For Lang, ancient Greek myth, like the contemporary primitive religions, reeked of unsavoury characteristics that could not be explained away by mistaken etymologies derived from determinedly rational Aryan precursors. Modern so-called primitive religions and old Greek myths alike are ‘cruel, puerile, obscure, like the fancies of the savage myth-makers from which they spring’.⁸⁷ Lang’s object was to eradicate myth’s unfortunate residue of superstitious irrationality in British culture by pointing out its savage origin. In this respect Lang resembles George Grote, valuing the rational humanistic Western tradition over the humiliating superstitions of non-Western culture.⁸⁸

Like Lang, Harrison judges the rich sexuality and illogical fancies present in later Greek religion as residual elements or esoteric survivals from archaic times, but in contrast to Lang, she exults in the unearthing of Greek artefacts that demonstrate lingering belief in demons, ghosts, and local earth and fertility goddesses. Harrison’s turn to pre-Olympian earth divinities topples hierarchic rationalism in existing Victorian mythography, substituting collective emotion as the human impetus for ritual, religion, and for art. Harrison’s theory of ritual comprises an attempt to reverse and heal the divisiveness of gender binarism, which falsely partitions human psychology

into a sort of order of merit or as it is called a hierarchy, with Reason as the head and crown, and under her sway the emotions and passions. The result of establishing this hierarchy is that the impulsive side of our nature comes off badly, the passions and even the emotions lying under a certain ban. [...] A more fruitful way of looking at our human constitution is to see it, not as a bundle of separate faculties, but as a sort of continuous cycle. (*PGR*, p. 38)

Ratiocination, man’s traditional ‘crown’ of reason, she downgrades to a practically nonexistent role, by first redefining *conception* or knowledge as *perception*, ‘receiving and recognising a stimulus from without’. Emotion and action are equally, if not more important than any cognitive process. As she examined primitive ritualistic dances, she concluded that ‘oddly enough, an impulse emotional in itself begets a process we think of as characteristically and exclusively intellectual, the process of abstraction’. Harrison avers that ritual is one step removed from life and one step preceding art, ‘a bridge between real life and art’ (*PGR*, p. 42). Along with this shift she also detected – and deeply regretted – a movement away from

result of the inevitable decay of language, Müller’s philology partakes of what Turner calls the ‘mid-Victorian domestication of the Greeks’. See *The Greek Heritage*, p. 113.

⁸⁷ Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth* (London: Longmans & Co., 1884), p. 28.

⁸⁸ Oxford classicist Lewis Farnell devoted his five-volume *The Cults of the Greek States* (1896–1906) to castigating what he believed to be the ‘immoral’ character of Greek myths.

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direct participation to the passive speculation that Tess adopts while watching the Chaseborough revellers:

In [...] actual life [primitive man] hunts and fishes and ploughs and sows, being utterly intent on the practical end of gaining his food; in the *dromenon* [rites] of the Spring Festival, though his *acts* are unpractical, being merely singing and dancing and mimicry, his *intent* is practical, to induce the return of the food-supply. (*PGR*, p. 43)

The problem for Hardy is that however much he is fascinated by the spectacle of the sexually charged primitive dance, he cannot escape the fact that the riotous melee at Chaseborough has little of the profound anthropological import that Harrison attaches to the 'aneikonic' cults of Demeter and Dionysus, representing 'the supreme golden moment achieved by the Greek' because they were irrational, 'the outcome rather of emotion than of intellect.' Harrison's aneikonic ritual 'aims at union'; it is the 'sacramental' experience of a force beyond human comprehension.⁸⁹ Her goal is to recoup the exotic and erotic potential that Western culture sacrificed in its prim refutation of its Greek ancestry. Not only Harrison, but also John Addington Symonds registered the irrational sexuality in myth that Max Müller and his acolytes tried to dilute or explain away.⁹⁰ Hardy, although alert to the graphic sexual content in Greek myth, denotes that the Chaseborough revel falls far short of the Dionysian 'discharge of emotion' to which Harrison reacts with enthusiastic appreciation:

Through this floating fusty *debris* of peat and hay, mixed with the perspirations and warmth of the dancers, and forming together a sort of vegeto-human pollen, the muted fiddles feebly pushed their notes, in marked contrast to the spirit with which the measure was trodden out. They coughed as they danced, and laughed as they coughed. Of the rushing couples there could barely be discerned more than the high lights – the indistinctness shaping them to satyrs clasping nymphs – a multiplicity of Pans whirling a multiplicity of Syrinxes; Lotis attempting to elude Priapus, and always failing.

At intervals a couple would approach the doorway for air, and the haze no longer veiling their features, the demigods resolved themselves into the homely personalities of her own next-door neighbours. Could Trantridge in two or three short hours have metamorphosed itself thus madly! (*Tess*, pp. 66-67)

⁸⁹ Harrison, *Reminiscences of a Student's Life*, pp. 198-205.

⁹⁰ Symonds's homosexuality prompted him to perceive Greek culture from a different perspective, exploring the range of possibilities mythography provided for gender subversion in the Victorian age. Symonds pointed out, in contrast to Müller's linguistic approach, 'the deities are male and female, not because their names have gender, but because the thinking' deems 'sex' as 'all-important' and projects 'its own conditions into the world outside it' (*Studies of the Greek Poets*, I, p. 59). The Greeks fashioned their gods and goddesses according to their needs, and so did Müller and Symonds.

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On this night when the dancers take on the attributes of primitive divinities, Tess is seduced/raped. Harrison's emancipatory outpouring of 'emotion' leads in Hardy's fictional scheme to entrapment, sexual violence and tragedy. In Greek mythology, the water nymph Syrinx was pursued by the lascivious fertility god Pan, a creature with the horns, ears, and legs of a goat. Syrinx could escape because the other gods, showing pity, turned her into a reed. Priapus, the god of animal and vegetable fertility, pursued Lotis, the daughter of the sea-god, but she also evaded capture by turning into a lotus flower. Tess does not elude her pursuer in *The Chase*. In *Ancient Art and Ritual*, Harrison deplores a cultural 'advance' that excludes the majority of people from active and unaffected participation in communal performance. The experience of catharsis through art retains only a modicum of its original power as spiritual purgation and transcendence through collective ritual dance and song. But Hardy's sardonic 'staging' of the Chaseborough event expresses radical ambivalence about the individual and communal benefits that accrue to this mode of group participation.

In contrast to the 'local Cerealia' (*Tess*, p. 19) once practised by Roman matrons who abstained from wine and sensual gratification for several days, the second dance at Chaseborough shows husbands and wives excitedly pursuing other drunken partners. This effectively cheapens Harrison's 'deep conviction' that religion must be experiential, leading her to link the Dionysian religious impulse with drama:

[i]t is this childlike power of utter impersonation, of *being* the thing we act or even see acted, this extension and intensification of our own personality, that lives deep down in all of us, and is the very seat and secret of our joy in the drama.⁹¹

Harrison connotes here that the austere hierarchical divisions between 'low' and 'high', 'savage' and 'civilised', 'primitive' and 'modern' – divisions which persist in Frazer's research – are dismantled so that ancient experience, both religious and creative, intertwines with the modern.

Hardy also imaginatively excavates this terrain, but in a spirit of sceptical critique. Like Marlott's 'Cerealia', the Chaseborough carouse, though it may once have fulfilled an enabling social role, epitomises a stagnant and shabby performance, in which reckless self-abandon masquerades as Harrison's pagan 'joy'. In depicting how his modern rustic 'initiates' are irrefragably separated from Eleusinian grandeur and dignity, Hardy here anticipates Ezra Pound, who according to Feder,

⁹¹ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 166.

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equates mystery, truth, ritual, and poetry, all of which could be combined through participation in ancient rites such as were practised at Eleusis. In Pound's view, the modern world has violated the tradition of Eleusis.⁹²

The apparent transformation of Hardy's reeling couples into 'satyrs clasping nymphs' indicates that 'levity' (*Tess*, p. 66) and 'whorage' (*Tess*, p. 70) have smothered the time-hallowed and exacting obligations of the agricultural calendar. The entire group of Hardy's 'panting shapes' aspires to the only form of 'immortality' left for it – to become deranged 'demigods' through libertine surfeit. Hardy's stringent treatment undercuts the expansive Dionysian drunkenness defined by William James in his 1902 discussion of 'The Varieties of Religious Experience':

The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes. It is in fact the great exciter of the Yes function in man. It brings its votary from the chill periphery of things to the radiant core. It makes him for the moment one with truth.⁹³

Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, published the same year as Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1871), investigated dancing in relation to a more sinister and fickle concept of 'induced ecstasy' and 'demoniacal possession',⁹⁴ terms relevant to the perfervid Chaseborough dance where patterned simplicity blurs into dizzying activity, steeped in fug, alcoholic transport, and dissolved identities. The revel makes it impossible to distinguish between human and nonhuman: '[i]t was then that the ecstasy and the dream began, in which emotion was the matter of the universe, and matter but an adventitious intrusion likely to hinder you from spinning where you wanted to spin' (*Tess*, p. 67). By shifting to the 'you' pronoun, the narrator literally brings us down to earth with a comic collision that momentarily undermines the disturbing strangeness of the weekly dance in which the process of possession transfigures its participants.

Hardy measures Tess's 'ecstatic' condition when baptizing her sickly child against its polluted and pernicious counterpart induced by alcohol in her wayward parents and fellow labourers. The metamorphosis of the Chaseborough celebrants does not illustrate Harrison's lofty concept of the human elevated to divine status, but rather the human descending into an amoral netherworld of extreme physical appetite, a change strikingly imaged by 'vegeto-human pollen' formed from the perspiration and the shed's thick

⁹² Feder, *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry*, p. 202.

⁹³ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans, 1908), p. 387.

⁹⁴ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, II, p. 420.

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dusty atmosphere. Only in the lamp's dim radiance do these 'demigods' revert to 'the homely personalities' of Tess's 'next-door neighbours' (*Tess*, p. 67). When a young man asks Tess to 'have a turn' with him, Hardy's verbal texture alters from the ominous to the exuberantly irrereligious:

'Don't ye be nervous, my dear good soul!' expostulated between his coughs a young man with a wet face, and his straw hat so far back upon his head that the brim encircled it like the nimbus of a saint. 'What's yer hurry? To-morrow is Sunday, thank God, and we can sleep it off in church time. Now, have a turn with me?' (*Tess*, p. 67)

The imagery of saints and halos that Hardy applies ironically to his strayed revellers on their trek homeward underlines how the Trantridge 'children of the open air' are like Tess's parents and their neighbours who evade the social 'muck and muddle' of life to seek 'beatitude' at Rolliver's tavern or The Pure Drop Inn.⁹⁵ They briefly attain a 'stage of mental comfort' in which 'their souls expanded beyond their skins, and spread their personalities warmly through the room' (*Tess*, p. 30), concealing their illicit tittle from unwelcome interlopers by righteously intoning their 'Catechism' (*Tess*, p. 32) about club-walking – one of the last surviving links between Tess's threadbare village culture and the nature-goddess Demeter. Hardy would have sympathised with Andrew Lang's contention that the 'old mythologists worked at [...] myths dried and pressed in thoroughly literary books, Greek and Latin. But we now study [...] mythology *in situ* – in savages and peasants still in the mythopoeic stage of thought'.⁹⁶ However, Hardy's sensation-seeking Chaseborough 'peasants' do not harmonise with Lang's exalted sense of the agricultural labourer as a living anthropological specimen or document, in which 'marvels of myth are parts of practical everyday belief'.⁹⁷ Hardy's tendency is to discredit this optimistic conception of the modern peasant class as a 'survival' through barbed comedy.

VI

That Tess is in search of a more advanced harmony becomes apparent in her dogged refusal to be assimilated into the frenetic Chaseborough revel. The need for a purer context to enable 'rebirth' into a realm of enriched sensation is addressed in the Marlott harvesting (Chapter 14). Hardy again portrays

⁹⁵ See Denis W. Thomas, 'Drunkness in Thomas Hardy's Novels', *College Language Association Journal*, 28 (1984), 190-209.

⁹⁶ Andrew Lang, *Modern Mythology*, p. xix.

⁹⁷ Andrew Lang, *Modern Mythology*, p. xix.

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'survivals' of fertility myth from a startling perspective; showing a comparable inventiveness with chiaroscuro effects, a vivid sense of suspended time and dance-like movement. But it is precisely these conditions of 'seeing' which engenders a suspicion that this event is far from a revitalised contact with enigmatic, nonhuman potencies:

The sun, on account of the mist, had a curious, sentient, personal look, demanding the masculine pronoun for its adequate expression. His present aspect, coupled with the lack of all human forms in the scene, explained the old-time heliolatries in a moment. One could feel that a saner religion had never prevailed under the sky. The luminary was a golden-haired, beaming, mild-eyed, godlike creature, gazing down in the vigour and intentness of youth upon an earth that was brimming with interest for him. (*Tess*, p. 92)

The youthful, beneficent sun-god presiding over the harvest connotes a natural harmony in which the forces and energies that held such anarchic sway at Chaseborough are being methodically marshalled and redirected towards more socially responsible ends. But it is only because of the 'mist' – a distorting medium that often causes moral and intellectual befuddlement in *Tess* (morning mist stimulates Angel Clare's injurious illusions about the heroine as Artemis and Demeter in Chapter 20) – that the sun appears a kindly deity. And the phrase 'one could feel that' signals a less than fully committed interpreting spectator.

Hardy's notion of the timeless 'heliolatries' is slippery: to apprehend primeval pagan meanings does not denote a more invigorating mode of life: people were once cruelly sacrificed to the sun, whose presence is aggressively tangible at one point: '[h]is light a little later broke through chinks of cottage shutters, throwing stripes like red-hot pokers upon cupboards' (*Tess*, p. 92). Yet the sun presides over a community apparently close to the rhythms of fertility ritual: the long, rickety reaping-machine makes a ticking sound 'like the love-making of the grasshopper'; Tess and the other field-women betray an intimate connection of human and natural processes.⁹⁸ And the sun takes a personal interest in the dance-like motion of the workers who follow the pace of the reaping-machine and horses, contrasting with Flintcomb-Ash.

In the opening paragraphs of Chapter 14, the harvest is presented as a mode of keeping man in touch with nature, thus drawing attention to a reverence for order and unhurried rhythm, the involved patterning and choreography. However, the reminder that sun worship had its sacrificial aspect – sunlight imparts to the revolving Maltese cross of the reaping-

⁹⁸ The name of Tess, a form of Theresa, is Greek for 'to glean' or 'to reap'. See R. N. G. Marken, "'Sick for Home": The Theme of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", *English Studies in Canada*, 4 (1978), 320.

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machine ‘a look of having been dipped in liquid fire’ (*Tess*, p. 92) – together with the brutal Marlott harvest-custom of killing small animals (‘Rabbits, hares, snakes, rats, mice, retreated inwards as into a fastness’), unaware of the ephemeral nature of their refuge, ironically subverts the images of a heliotropic idyll. For Frazer, human or animal sacrifice in which victims were assaulted, hung, dismembered, or torn apart while still alive epitomised the destruction of the corn by man. But this does not make the barbarisms any more palatable to Hardy’s narrator.

The grisly Marlott harvest-custom of sacrificial slaughter foreshadows the grim portrait of Flintcomb-Ash in winter, where ‘the low sun beamed’ in a village like ‘a place of the dead’ (*Tess*, p. 272). That Tess chooses to disguise herself as an older, more weather-beaten woman, reminiscent of the cadaverous votive sisterhood at the club-walk, is integral to Hardy’s mythical framework:

As soon as she got out of the village she entered a thicket and took from her basket one of the oldest field-gowns, which she had never put on even at the dairy [...] She also, by a felicitous thought, took a handkerchief from her bundle, and tied it round her face under her bonnet, covering her chin and half her cheeks, and temples, as if she were suffering from toothache. Then with her little scissors, by the aid of a pocket looking-glass, she mercilessly snipped her eyebrows off (*Tess*, p. 272)

Tess’s self-mutilation, deflecting the gaze of male observers (“‘What a mommet of a maid!’” said the next man who met her to a companion’) signifies Demeter’s decision to disfigure and emaciate her own body in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.⁹⁹ This portrayal of the primordial mother as Crone is most closely associated in modern times with the human suffering and pain accompanying the loss of an innocent child. Grieved beyond reasoning, Demeter becomes the wanderer and exile, the epitome of barren rage in the face of violation and despair:

[w]ithdrawing from the assembly of the gods and high Olympus
she went among the cities and fertile fields of men,
disguising her beauty for a long time. No one of men
nor deep-girt women recognized her when they looked
(*HHD*, ll.92-95)

This time Tess traverses not ‘fertile fields’ but a desolate hinterland in search of menial labour:

⁹⁹ The first figures to encounter the disguised Demeter in the *Homeric Hymn* are four young maidens. The comparison of the girls to flowers and goddesses recalls the abducted Persephone and emphasises the role reversal (from divine to human) undertaken by Demeter.

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Thus Tess walks on; a figure which is part of the landscape; a fieldwoman pure and simple; in winter guise [...] Every thread of that old attire has become faded and thin under the stroke of rain-drops, the burn of sunbeams, and the stress of winds [...] Her object being a winter's occupation and a winter's home there was no time to lose. (*Tess*, pp. 272-73)

The 'Mother' goddess assumes the Crone's guise as a post-menopausal and 'ancient serving-woman',¹⁰⁰ auguring the return of this aspect of the Triple Goddess that takes place by the end of the myth. Maddened, dazed with grief, Demeter reflects, according to Phyllis Chesler, the terrors of reality: '[h]er bones seem to shrink, her cheeks become wrinkled. She bound up her hair and turned wanderer'.¹⁰¹ Maiden and Mother are two phases of the female lifecycle through which Tess passes. The third, the 'wise crone' stage, is embodied in the goddess Hecate. In her fullness, Demeter was the Triple Goddess of Maiden, Mother, and Crone. The three were so closely intertwined, with so many overlapping functions and roles, that significant merging occurred, as is evident from the goddesses' depiction on sacred monuments and in other ancient works of art as three indistinguishable female forms holding one torch. There is no strict differentiation here; duality and trinity are both separate and simultaneous, part of the fluid and paradoxical vision of early pagan thought. By Homeric times, this triplicity is redefined as three distinct but dynamically interlinked deities: Kore as Maiden, Demeter as Mother, and Hecate as Crone.¹⁰² They may also appear sequentially, following the natural cycle: flower, fruit, and rot that makes compost for the maiden hidden in the fruit – the seeds that will sprout again in new buds. Hecate heard the kidnapped Persephone's cries, accompanied (or led) Demeter to Helios to discover where Persephone had been transported, and followed Demeter in greeting the returned Persephone.

The presence of Hecate as Demeter's companion as she seeks to know what has become of her daughter is significant, even though it is not stressed by Homer. In other versions of the myth, either Demeter or Hecate journeyed to the underworld to find Persephone, showing the interchangeability of the

¹⁰⁰ Harrison, 'Demeter', 147.

¹⁰¹ Chesler, *Women and Madness*, p. xiv.

¹⁰² In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* Hecate plays a mediating role between mother and daughter, where she both assimilates herself closely to the mother, and promises to serve as a ritual attendant, perhaps even as a maternal substitute, to Persephone. An ancient form of the goddess, Hecate was herself originally called 'the triple goddess' because, in the days preceding the advent of the Olympian gods, she ruled over the three realms of earth, sky, and underworld. Hecate may be derivative of Heqit (Hekat), one of the oldest of the Egyptian goddess figures. As a sky deity, the Greek Hecate personified the dark phase of the moon's cycle, when the moon is hidden or 'underground'. Like all moon divinities, Hecate was a guardian of maidens and also persisted over childbirth. As an earth deity, she was a nurturing mother figure, a double for Demeter, as the classical myth makes explicit.

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two as maternal divinities. Hecate's pre-Olympian triplicity readily merged with the chthonic Maiden/Mother duality.¹⁰³ The *Homeric Hymn* hints that Demeter's 'Crone' aspect appears to have been largely effaced, reflecting perhaps the impact of a historical influence that, according to Harrison's *Prolegomena*, would eventually diabolise and negate the potency of the Crone altogether. Hecate was relegated from a position of imperious death-goddess to a mere witch, or appearing in Demeter's disguise as a frail old woman when she travels to Eleusis.¹⁰⁴

Tess's 'Crone' disguise ominously prepares her for the 'underworld' experience as a labourer on the bleakly inhospitable Flintcomb-Ash farm (the name suggesting burnt-out matter). Farmer Groby¹⁰⁵ manages a dreary field that 'was a complexion, without features, as if a face from chin to brow should be only an expanse of skin' (*Tess*, p. 277). The simile here almost matches one in two lines that Hardy recorded in his "'1867" Notebook', spoken by the grieving Demeter in Swinburne's poem, 'At Eleusis': '[a]ll fields are helpless in the sun, all trees / Stand as a man stripped out of all but skin'.¹⁰⁶ The sterility of this environment, intended as an anti-type of the Marlott and Talbothays terrain, also conjures up the famine-ravaged space in George Meredith's poem 'The Appeasement of Demeter' (1887). But the

¹⁰³ Hecate, in terms of her role as a chthonic god, was Persephone's constant companion in the netherworld, almost her alter ego. Hecate's myriad associations with things dark, veiled or hidden linked her with spirits, revenants, and occult power. Coming from her dark cave (a chthonic space), she was often depicted holding a torch, another connection to Persephone and Demeter, who were also portrayed thus. Hecate, however, was given the epithet *phosphoros*, bringer of light, implying that her torch was figurative; the radiance of understanding was her gift. For instance, Hecate, bearing a torch, led Demeter to enlightenment from Helios. Hecate lit the pathway to the nether realm for the newly dead, helping them cross over from the upper world to the domain of shadows, just as she aided newborns cross over from the dark world into the light at birth. The gift she bequeathed was a sober apprehension of mortality, an unblinking awareness that death is always part of life.

¹⁰⁴ The Crone appears again in Demeter's magical ceremonial of holding the child Demophoön in the fire to make him immortal. The chthonic Demeter no longer rules the underworld as home; her place has been usurped, apparently by the patriarchal underside of Zeus. Demeter Chthonia is a Crone aspect not connected with the Goddess's anger; she is simply the underworld form of Demeter (just as Zeus Chthonious referred to the underworld Zeus, or Hades). Like Persephone she is sovereign over the realm of the dead, and the dead are called by her name, 'Demeteroi' or 'Demeter's People'. A summer festival in honour of Chthonia involved the sacrifice of a full-grown cow that offered itself voluntarily to the Goddess. Three old women immolated the cow and no one else, particularly men, was allowed to witness the burning. The age of the women priestesses for this rite, as well as the exclusion of men, adumbrates a pre-patriarchal origin to this ritual.

¹⁰⁵ At several key junctures in the novel, Groby almost seems to emerge from the ground, like a Plutonic emissary, to confront Tess again with her past, and refer her back to her original 'disgrace'.

¹⁰⁶ Entry 82 from Swinburne, 'At Eleusis', ll. 43-44 in *Poems and Ballads*, first series, 5th edn (London, 1873), p. 240 in 'The "1867" Notebook', *Literary Notebooks*, II, entry 82.

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power of laughter, which in this poem can shatter the curse and revive the parched soil, contrasts with the unrelieved misery of working life on Flintcomb-Ash, whose contours Hardy images as a massive recumbent female, 'bosomed with semi-globular tumuli – as if Cybele the Many-breasted were supinely extended there' (*Tess*, p. 273). This image recalls Hardy's delineation of Egdon in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, whose tumuli 'juttied roundly into the sky from the uplands, as though they were the full breasts of Diana Multimammia supinely extended there'.¹⁰⁷

Walter Pater notes that Demeter 'was blended, or identified with the Rhea Cybele – the wilder earth-goddess of Phrygia' (GS, p. 128). Given the hardened and unwelcoming surface of Flintcomb-Ash – so stark a contrast to the opulent lushness of Talbothays – it is apt that Cybele typified 'the earth in its primitive and savage state'.¹⁰⁸ According to Harrison's 1883 essay on Demeter, 'Rhea Kybele' was 'savage and dreadful', and though often 'confused with Demeter' was rather a personification 'of the earth uncultivated, barren and terrible, not of the earth as a fruitful mother – the land that is ploughed and sown and reaped that man may love'.¹⁰⁹ The flints of the 'starve-acre place' (*Tess*, p. 277) may have fertile 'phallic shapes' – perhaps a grim reminder that in what Frazer terms a 'ghastly rite', Cybele's priests castrated themselves in entering the service of the divinity – but the 'stubborn soil' thwarts all attempts at cultivation. Upon this cheerless and deformed expanse, grotesquely parodying the ideal of Nature as an active, immediate, maternal entity, Tess battles against harsh winter weather and the steam threshing-machine, whose engineer is portrayed thus:

He was in the agricultural world, but not of it. He served fire and smoke [...] He travelled with his engine from farm to farm, from county to county, for as yet the steam threshing-machine was itinerant in this part of Wessex. He spoke in a strange northern accent, his thoughts being turned inwards upon himself [...] holding only strictly necessary intercourse with the natives, as if some ancient doom compelled him to wander here against his will in the service of his *Plutonic master*. (*Tess*, pp. 315-16; emphasis mine)

An iconic delineation of a specific power-structure, the engineer, serving 'fire and smoke', has no passionate feeling for the locale; to him people are merely mindless factors in the process of production. This dark attendant is compared to a chthonic creature, a slave of Pluto, Lord of the Dead. While Tess works alongside the machine in what David Musselwhite calls a

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, ed. by Dale Kramer (Oxford: The World's Classics, 1987), p. 330.

¹⁰⁸ *The Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, ed. by Felix Guirand, and intro. by Robert Graves (London: Hamlyn, 1966), p. 173.

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, 'Demeter', 149.

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‘featureless “capitalist” desert’,¹¹⁰ she becomes, like Persephone in winter, literally separated from her mother, the earth. Since the effects of Alec and the threshing machine on Tess are virtually the same – discomposing and reducing her to a condition of insentient animality – Hardy transfers Pluto’s epithet, the ‘inexorable’, from d’Urberville to the machine. With ‘the inexorable wheels continuing to spin’, Tess unties the sheaves of corn sacred to Demeter to supply her ‘Plutonic master’.

The *topos* of Flintcomb-Ash, with its unfruitful soil and relentless, unforgiving industrial apparatus that demolishes human identity, is for Tess ‘pandemonium’ (*Tess*, p. 324), the site of all demons and the capital of Hell in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. But she is a fertility figure who must keep her own productiveness alive amid the unrelieved desolation of the Flintcomb-Ash netherworld, although the alarming alteration in her physical demeanour denotes otherwise. When Angel returns to claim Tess, the season is at best only a fake spring – winter overlaid with a sparse covering of verdure.

VII

Chapter 58, which delineates Tess and Clare’s impressions as they find themselves spending their honeymoon at Stonehenge, supplies the final elaborate configuration of the Demeter-Persephone motif. Tess approximates to an earth goddess that simultaneously incorporates two warring phases of nature: asexual (which stops her joining the Chaseborough carouse), and sexual forces; the Christian and the pagan (her ancestor is named Pagan d’Urberville), the luxuriantly fecund and the wantonly destructive (in her murder of Alec).¹¹¹ That Tess can take the life of one who had abused her intimates the unleashed godly strength of vengeance and death in the duality of Demeter’s human distress and divine retribution. In her roles as Mother Goddess, Corn Goddess, and Revealer of the arcane mysteries symbolising ‘woman’ in myth, she is the deity in Triad. Explaining the complex significance of Demeter, Kerényi writes:

¹¹⁰ Musselwhite, *Social Transformations in Hardy’s Tragic Novels*, p. 89.

¹¹¹ Tess’s murder of Alec evokes contemporary socio-medical injunctions which warned of the perils of inexpressible female passion: ‘[i]n woman, the concentration of her feelings [...] adds to their intensity; and like a smouldering fire that has at last got vent, her passions, when no longer trammelled by conventional propriety, burst forth in unquenchable violence’. See J. G. Millingen, *Mind and Matter, Illustrated by Considerations on Heredity, Insanity, and the Influence of Temperament in the Development of the Passions* (London: Hurst, 1847), pp. 157-58.

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The grain-figure is essentially the figure of both origin and end, of mother and daughter; and just because of that it points beyond the individual to the universal and eternal. It is always the grain that sinks to earth and returns, always the grain that is mown down in golden fullness and yet, as fat and healthy seed, remains whole, mother and daughter in one.¹¹²

This combination is sacrificed at the ancient temple of Stonehenge, recalling the Proserpine of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads First Series*: nature personified as mortality and sleep. After flinging herself with exhausted relief upon the large, flat altar stone, Tess awakens to discover she is surrounded by shadowy figures of the law who appear as if wearing ritual masks: 'in the growing light, their faces and hands [...] were silvered, the remainder of their figures dark' (*Tess*, p. 381). Her execution by hanging marks the collapse of a noble and nurturing conception of a natural divinity. That there seems to be no hope of reconstruction is compounded by Hardy exploiting the staginess of Tess's arrest in 'a place of cultural beginnings',¹¹³ where people were sacrificed to the sun. Hardy follows Swinburne in denying the optimistic pattern of rebirth with its implication of an afterlife, which the Persephone myth verbalises according to Kerényi: '[t]o enter the figure of Demeter means to be pursued, to be robbed, raped, to fail to understand, to rage and grieve, but then to get everything back and be born again'.¹¹⁴ That Hardy obviates any compensating or consoling hint of redemption is underlined by the wild treeless isolation of Salisbury Plain, and by the Henge itself, a forbidding image of stony circularity, emblem of narrative closure. Although in perpetual and precipitate flight across the face of Wessex, Tess cannot in the end outmanoeuvre the constellations of power that bear repeatedly down upon her.

Despite the 'promise of a life to come' (*GS*, p. 93) implicit in Pater's punctilious scrutiny of Demeter-Persephone, Hardy is more committed to magnifying its bleaker resonances. This is underpinned by Stonehenge as 'the hub of olden Wessex',¹¹⁵ denoting an order based not on providential patterning but on affliction and death. Mortality here is not the exacting yet precious pledge of fresh vigour for the community. Something of society's culpability may be expiated by Tess's 'sacrifice' amid the elemental grandeur

¹¹² Jung and Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull, p. 12.

¹¹³ Kevin Z. Moore, *The Descent of the Imagination: The Decline of Postromantic Culture in the Later Novels of Thomas Hardy* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), p. 215.

¹¹⁴ Jung and Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, p. 128.

¹¹⁵ The quotation is taken from an interview reported in the *Daily Chronicle*, August 24, 1899, p.3 in which Hardy talks about Stonehenge. This interview, 'Shall Stonehenge Go?', is reprinted in *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings: Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences*, ed. by Harold Orel (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 196-201. Hereafter referred to as *Personal Writings*.

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of this site, though the fierce determination she embodies will never be reawakened. Acceptance of retributive sacrificial suffering as a precondition to the attainment of new vitality will not function here. Pater traces the moral life back to its source in the physical, so as to reconcile himself and his readers emotionally to their inevitable habitation in and of the material earth. Pater's fondness for Gothic motifs of antiquarian desiccation is superficially similar to Hardy's cheerless conception of Wessex as a gigantic graveyard through which the nomadic Tess drifts. But Pater, unlike Hardy, dignifies and domesticates the primal fear of mortality. In the first part of his 'Demeter and Persephone' essay, Pater reverts to etymology as the 'archaeology' of language and to mythography as 'archaeology' of human consciousness so that death might be only 'a rush of home-sickness'.¹¹⁶ Tess is permitted no such Paterian solace of biological or cultural rebirth.

At a mute monument of forgotten faiths, Tess realises that the only certainty is oblivion unalleviated by any glimmer of transcendence: '[f]or there is no God found stronger than death; and death is a sleep' (Swinburne, 'Hymn to Proserpine', l. 110). Clare cannot save Tess from her wish for 'the sleep eternal / In an eternal night' (Swinburne, 'Garden of Proserpine', ll. 95-96). When she is hanged at Wintonchester, the earth is no longer under even the vestigial stewardship of non-Christian divinities, for Hardy's reference to the 'President of the Immortals' parades a terribly barbed wit, as does Clare's final stealing away with his deceased wife's pretty younger sister on his arm. Clare professes that old faiths fallen into desuetude or injurious superstition must be eradicated, but he cannot assemble any new myths to replace them.

Projecting himself as severely displaced from any sustaining religious context, Pater reads back into Demeter-Persephone his own biting sense of alienation, trying to irradiate the quotidian and salvage the exiled gods. He raises the dual goddess into a flexible, organic concept that will never become outmoded, and which can even 'make us in love, or at least at peace, with death' (GS, p. 275). Pater's mythographic enterprise insists on Demeter-Persephone's continuing humanistic, aesthetic, and ethical resonance, rather than on its unfathomably crude and vicious anthropological provenance.¹¹⁷ Hardy subverts these ideas, showing how the arrest of Tess at the pagan temple of Stonehenge confirms the *ruined* character of the mythical past in a

¹¹⁶ Pater, 'Winckelmann' p. 160.

¹¹⁷ 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone' seemed to Pater himself 'the most laborious and difficult piece of work he had ever done'. See A. C. Benson, *Walter Pater* (London: Macmillan, 1906), p. 71. The difficulty was due partly to Pater's drafting the essay at a time of personal and professional crisis, in the turbulent aftermath of the publication of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). For a full account of the reception of Pater's *Renaissance*, see *The Renaissance: The 1893 Text*, ed. by Donald C. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 443-451.

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'crude' contemporary society hurtling unalterably towards spiritual suicide, which evokes Nietzsche's observation, 'Man today, stripped of myth stands famished among his pasts'.¹¹⁸ In the words of Carlyle's Diogenes Teufelsdröckh as he stumbles in the hell of the 'Everlasting No': '[t]he Universe is [...] dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres!'¹¹⁹ This feeling is accentuated by the fact that Tess is sentenced in a court not even depicted by the narrative.¹²⁰

VIII

Hardy's next published novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1895), illustrates that the only mythology available to fill the void once productively occupied by classical stories such as Demeter-Persephone is that of a soulless, punitive and paranoid Christianity. That *Jude* includes no mythical underpinning analogous to the divine tale of 'Mother' and 'Maid' is its central message. The governing patriarchal elite behind the execution of Tess is the very regime upheld and ratified by Christminster. Hardy transmutes the tale of a mistreated, sexually violated peasant girl into the tale of an orphaned boy of the rural proletariat with an ardent love of learning, who becomes a victim of the lust of others as well as of his own. Hardy elaborates a frantic struggle between natural forces: the protagonist is pulled apart by the sexually charged Arabella Donn and the asexual Sue Bridehead, thus recalling the Alec d'Urberville/Angel Clare conflict. However, a component essential to healthy living (such as inhabits Tess?) has vanished. Arabella Donn is no more a figure of blossoming sexuality than Sue Bridehead. Arabella is a crass materialist, 'a complete and substantial female animal' (*Jude*, p. 36), whose impenitent piggishness links her with the 'unclean animal' of Mosaic laws. Margaret Oliphant, in her vituperative review of *Jude* for *Blackwood's Magazine* in January 1896, called her 'a human pig, like the beast whom in a horrible scene she and her husband kill'.¹²¹ Oliphant refers to the pig-sticking which Hardy portrays as a macabre parody of primitive sacrifice, instances of which crowd the pages of *The Golden Bough*. The pig, particularly the sow,

¹¹⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, pp. 36-37.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Carlyle, *Works*, I, p. 150.

¹²⁰ See Beth Kalikoff, 'The Execution of Tess d'Urberville at Wintonchester', in *Executions and the British Experience from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century: A Collection of Essays*, ed. by William B. Thesing (New York: McFarland, 1990), pp. 111-21; Sarah Nicholson, 'The Woman Pays: Death and the Ambivalence of Providence in Hardy's Novels', *Literature and Theology*, 16 (2002), 27-39.

¹²¹ See *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by R. G. Cox (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 258.

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was once considered a chthonic creature, the uterine animal of the earth. Frazer writes in relation 'to the corn-goddess Demeter':

remembering that in European folk-lore the pig is a common embodiment of the corn-spirit, we may now ask whether the pig, which was so closely associated with Demeter, may not have been originally the goddess herself in animal form? The pig was sacred to her; in art she was portrayed carrying or accompanied by a pig; and the pig was regularly sacrificed in her mysteries. (*GB*, p. 483)

'Pherrephata', one of many variants of Persephone's name, means 'killer of suckling pigs', associating her with the pigs sacrificed during the Eleusinian Mysteries and other ceremonies consecrated to the Mother. The pig became the emblem of Eleusis, stamped on all Eleusinian coins. The votive pigs were sacred to Demeter and Persephone because they commemorated those of Eubouleus that were, according to Clement of Alexandria, devoured in the very same infernal chasm that claimed Kore.¹²² The earliest ritualistic worship of the Mother involved imitative magic: something fruitful was placed in the earth – an ear of corn, a pregnant sow, or in Central and South America, a female sacrificial victim – in the belief that this act would cause the earth to be richly productive. In the Greek rites of the Thesmophoria, suckling pigs were thrown into clefts in the earth, while the fleshly remains of the previous year's pigs were brought up and mixed with the seeds about to be planted in order to effect a bountiful harvest.¹²³

However, Jude's grudging slaughter of the pig reveals an unbridgeable gulf between an ancient ceremonial venerating the animal as a resonant symbol of agricultural rather than nomadic life-style, and the grisly modern-day equivalent in which it is 'an inferior species' (*Jude*, p. 124). This act impinges on Jude not as a farmer's matter-of-fact chore, but rather as a sickening series of physical phenomena from which he cannot, for all his

¹²² The archaeologist Charles Newton uncovered a number of one- and two-foot-long figures of pigs in an excavated chamber at Cnidus in the 1860s. Yet as Andrew Lang remarked in a review of Walter Pater's *Greek Studies*, Pater 'omits the figurines of pigs in the precinct of the Cnidian Demeter; he does not tell us the odd fact that each initiated person took a swim in the sea with his pig at Eleusis.' See Lang, 'Mr. Pater's "Greek Studies"', *Illustrated London News* (9 March 1895), p. 299. Lang's remarks, set down after Pater's death, connote how ambivalent his stance towards Aestheticist Hellenism had become in the two decades since he had known Pater at Oxford. See also Andrew Lang, *Oxford* (London: Seeley, Service, 1914), p. 204.

¹²³ Helene P. Foley remarks on the Thesmophoria: 'Our best ancient source (a scholion to Lucian's "Dialogue of the Courtesans") tells us that the festival was celebrated in accordance with the Demeter/Persephone myth. When the earth opened for Kore, a swineherd named Eubouleus was swallowed with his swine in the same chasm. In honour of Eubouleus, piglets were thrown into the chasms of Demeter and Kore along with wheat cakes in the shape of snakes and phalli as well as the cones of the prolific pine tree. The rotted remains of the piglets are drawn from underground [...pits] by women called Bailers [...] who had purified themselves for three days.' See *The 'Homeric Hymn to Demeter'*, p. 73.

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nausea, flee. The exercise is little more than a meaningless infliction of suffering from which other creatures instinctively recoil, '[a] robin peered down at the preparations from the nearest tree, and, not liking the sinister look of the scene, flew away, though hungry' (*Jude*, p. 63). Hardy continues, '[b]y this time Arabella had joined her husband, and Jude, rope in hand, got into the sty, and noosed the affrighted animal, who, beginning with a squeak of surprise, rose to repeated cries of rage.' (*Jude*, p. 63) Rather than emitting a cry suspended between life and death, the pig produces a 'squeak' – ordinarily the sound of a mouse – that seems a sufficiently whimsical detail to undercut the reader's initial discomfort.

The 'bestial buffooneries' of Demeter's Eleusinian rituals that Andrew Lang noted with angry perplexity ('making Proserpine out of a porker')¹²⁴ Hardy twists into grotesquely comic pratfalls. Harrison argues that the pig was worshipped at Eleusis as a 'pharmakos' that conducted out evil through purification in the sea: it 'was the cheapest and commonest of sacrificial animals, one that each and every citizen could afford' (*PGR*, p. 153). For *Jude*, the pig-killing is the 'cheapest', 'commonest' facet of experience. Upon Hardy's swift alternations between dark threat and wry amusement, horror and farce (even the merging of such extremes so that we cannot respond to either one alone) the disturbing impact of this incident relies.¹²⁵

After Arabella and her husband bind the pig down its note 'changed its quality. It was not now rage, but the cry of despair; long-drawn, slow and hopeless' (*Jude*, p. 63). As in most of *Jude*'s 'black farce' episodes, the reader's emotional and intellectual reactions become profoundly unsettled (life is simultaneously perceived as absurd and deadly serious), and this in turn undermines any sense of a minutely ordered, familiar, and reassuring universe. After keeping the narrative uneasily poised between what is funny and what is frightening as an aghast, feckless Jude almost botches the killing, Hardy ends the episode by showing the squalid, degrading facts of the betrayed animal's death. This may be a pointedly violent riposte to Pater's essay on Demeter-Persephone that wilfully excludes, according to Andrew Lang, the grimmer implications of ancient worship. Pater's account is 'a prettified picture of Greek faith and custom'.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Andrew Lang, *The Homeric Hymns, A New Prose Translation and Essays, Literary and Mythological* (1899; Freeport: Books for the Libraries Press, 1972), p. 65.

¹²⁵ Walter Kerr's comment on black comedy is relevant to this scene: 'the laughter that greets black comedy is sporadic, uncertain, ill-at-ease'. See *Tragedy and Comedy* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1967), p. 176.

¹²⁶ Andrew Lang, 'Mr Pater's "Greek Studies"', p. 299. Lang projects himself here as liberated from the crippling inhibitions which mar Pater's mealy-mouthed chronicle, though even Lang fails to mention the fourteen pairs of votive breasts that Charles Newton uncovered in the same chamber as the votive pigs: 'Each [...] consists of a pair of female breasts placed on a plinth, and

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Hardy, like Pater, aims 'to bring the every-day aspect of Greek religion home to us' (GS, p. 272) but the 'every-day' is terrifying and traumatic in *Jude's* pig-sacrifice scene, the antithesis of Pater's hushed reverence, depicting Demeter's shrine as 'a quiet, twilight place' (GS, p. 275), or in Lang's disdainful opinion, 'a gallery almost hieratic in its stately repose, rather chill, full of good things'.¹²⁷ To borrow the terms of Pater's 'Winckelmann', Hardy evokes a 'relic of classical antiquity, laid open by accident to our alien, modern atmosphere'¹²⁸ but without the faintest trace of sacramental suggestiveness. 'A work of art', William Carlos Williams wrote, 'is important only as evidence, in its structure, of a new world it has created to affirm'.¹²⁹ Hardy, however sensitive to the whispered yet enduring echoes of a myth that commends the 'female principle', cannot envisage 'a new world' given that the pain of losing all in his Wessex world is unmitigated by the joy of recapturing all. This is the crisis point towards which *Tess* ineluctably moves, where Hardy finds it impossible to react with buoyantly witty effects to a fundamental lack of coherence in a supposedly 'Christian' country:

However unworkmanlike the deed, it had been mercifully done. The blood flowed out in a torrent instead of in the trickling stream she had desired. The dying animal's cry assumed its third and final tone, the shriek of agony; his glazing eyes riveting themselves on Arabella with the eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends. (*Jude*, p. 64)

The red and white imagery that dominates *Tess* (Alec's blood spreading like a stain across the Sandbourne ceiling) is given a ghastly reprise in the portrayal of the bled pig dying in the snow. Hardy consciously presents the pig stripped of any Eleusinian reference, and its slaughter underscores his central theme of paganism's defeat by a 'Christian' ethos that bleaches all mystery out of the 'Mysteries', dishonouring their status as a poetic fiction with the legitimacy both of spiritual tradition and of scientific discovery.

In the next chapter Mary Webb's *Gone to Earth* (1917) illustrates this sense of existential emptiness with its stern reappraisal of *Tess's* mythical framework. In Webb's novel, Hazel Woodus functions as a Persephone figure deprived of maternal care and refused any redemptive return from the netherworld of sexual violence to which she is exposed. Hazel's fate seems to bolster the feminist theologian Mary Daly's reading of Persephone as 'the

connected by a handle [...] The breasts vary in form; some appear to be those of young girls; others of women who have suckled children.' Newton, *A History of Discoveries*, II, pp. 386-87.

¹²⁷ Lang, 'Mr Pater's "Greek Studies"', p. 299.

¹²⁸ Pater, 'Winckelmann', p. 175.

¹²⁹ William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (New York, 1951), p. 196.

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essential tragedy of women after the patriarchal conquest'.¹³⁰ Webb is more scalding than Hardy in her chronicle of a secluded rustic community in which the 'Maiden' is compelled to become a wife and mother against her own better judgement; daughters who try to circumvent this 'natural' fate must deal with expulsion, destitution and death. The jubilant restoration of plenitude and growth stressed by sociologist Robert May, who judges Persephone the archetypal myth in the fantasy life of women, is routinely smothered by Webb's narrative.¹³¹ The earnest need to have faith that the Koreate beauty of spring will replenish a depleted and featureless modern topography is fervent; *Gone to Earth* demonstrates how this stubborn human desire goes largely unanswered and unrewarded.

¹³⁰ Mary Daly, 'Prelude to the First Passage', *Feminist Studies*, 4 (1978), 84. Daly focuses on the implications of Demeter sharing her mystical secrets with men and her attitude to letting Persephone return to Hades: 'It was fatal for her [Demeter] to undervalue the power of her own position and set aside her anger, just as it was fatal that she taught the kings of the earth her divine science and initiated them into her divine mysteries'.

¹³¹ See Robert May, *Sex and Fantasy* (New York and London, 1980), pp. 8-13. Similarly, for Gilligan and McClelland the myth exemplifies 'the feminine attitude toward power [...] the strengths of interdependence, building up resources and giving, that [...] characterise the mature feminine style'. See C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 22; D. C. McClelland, *Power: The Inner Experience* (New York, 1975). Neither Jung nor May supplies a convincing psychological explanation for the myth's historical appeal to the male initiate. Neumann, however, argues that the Mysteries afforded the male initiate the option to identify both with his own feminine and pre-patriarchal aspect (here he disagrees with Jung). See *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 323-24.

Chapter 4

‘Gone to Earth’: Mary Webb’s Doomed Persephone

I

Certainly there were splashings in the water,
Certainly there were shadows on the hill,
Dark with the leaves of purple-spotted orchis;
But now all’s still.

It may be that the catkin-covered willow,
With her illusive, glimmering surprise,
Pale golden-tinted as a tall young goddess,
Deceived my eyes¹

The wail of the lost was in her voice. She had not the slightest idea what the words meant (probably they meant nothing), but the sad cadence suited her emotional tone, and the ideas of loss and exile expressed her vague mistrust of the world.²

In a letter dated 5 September 1922, the novelist of rural Shropshire Mary Webb (1881-1927) addressed Thomas Hardy as ‘the greatest exponent of the wild human heart since Shakespeare’.³ In this letter Webb asked if she might dedicate to Hardy her forthcoming novel, *Seven for a Secret* (1922). The dedication reads, ‘[t]o the illustrious name / of / Thomas Hardy, / whose acceptance of this dedication / has made me so happy’.⁴ On 29 November 1922 Webb wrote again to say that she had sent a copy of the book and trusted that Hardy would ‘accept it as you would a child’s stalkless daisy – valueless, but given with enthusiasm and sincerity’.⁵ In the past decade, appraisals of early twentieth-century British novelists have augmented and enriched the definition of the modern movement to include the work of an increasing number of so-called ‘lost’ Edwardian writers. Given the

¹ Mary Webb, ‘The Ancient Gods’, in *Poems and ‘The Spring of Joy’*, p. 116.

² Webb, *Gone to Earth* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 69. Hereafter referred to as *GE*.

³ See *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), VI, p. 153n.

⁴ Mary Webb, *Seven for a Secret* (London: Virago, 1985).

⁵ *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate, VI, p. 153n.

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remarkable dearth of scholarly commentary devoted to Mary Webb’s regional fiction as a dissonant interrogation of Hardy’s core preoccupations, it appears that current critical opinion judges Webb’s *Gone to Earth* (1917) as ‘valueless’.⁶

According to Hugh Ross Williamson, surveying recent ‘country writers’ in 1931, there are

those who turn to Nature as a highly-idealised form of escape from urbanity; and there are those, inspired by reaction from this school, who delight in exhibiting the sordidness and narrowness of rusticity by reminding us that a picturesque village may contain more squalor than a hideous slum.⁷

Mary Webb does not fit smoothly into either category; instead she belongs to that group of novelists who ‘accepted the country without comparisons. To live there was not a mode of existence to be contrasted with the lot of the city-dweller; it gave her the only background for experience she knew’.⁸ Although contemporary reviewers registered that Webb’s evocation of the comfortless grandeur of the Shropshire countryside⁹ was as vibrantly anthropomorphic as Hardy’s Wessex, few have canvassed how *Gone to Earth* subtly reassesses *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and its dense network of allusions to the Persephone myth.

⁶ Webb’s oeuvre is noticeable by its absence from *The Gender of Modernism*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman’s Novel 1914-39* (London: Virago, 1983); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1982); Rosalind Miles, *The Female Form: Women Writers and the Conquest of the Novel* (London: Routledge, 1987); Maroula Joannou, ‘Ladies, Please Don’t Smash These Windows’: *Women’s Writing, Feminist Consciousness and Social Change 1918-38* (Oxford: Berg, 1995); Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Gina Wisker, *It’s My Party: Reading Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing* (London: Pluto Press, 1990).

⁷ Hugh Ross Williamson, ‘Portrait of Mary Butts’, *The Bookman*, 81 (1931), 188-89.

⁸ Williamson, ‘Portrait of Mary Butts’, 189.

⁹ All Webb’s novels except *Precious Bane* take place in the hill-country of southwest Shropshire, between the Cleve Hills and the Breiddens, and between Shrewsbury and Ludlow. Webb’s biographers, especially those of the 1930s, wrote to satisfy a craving for Webbsiana that had as much to do with elegiac fascination for Shropshire’s bucolic mores as it did with Webb herself. In his 1928 ‘Introduction’ to *Precious Bane*, the fifth of Webb’s six novels, the then British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin wrote, ‘[t]he scene of *Precious Bane* is the country of north Shropshire meres – the Ellesmere district, but the dialect is that of south Shropshire. It is the country of the Severn lowlands and of isolated upland ridges where Celt and Saxon have met and mingled for centuries’. See Webb, *Precious Bane*, introd. by Stanley Baldwin (London: Virago, 1989), p. 4. Hereafter referred to as *PB*. *Precious Bane* received the Prix Femina Vie Heureuse in 1925, a prize given for the ‘best imaginative work in prose or verse descriptive of English life by an author who has not gained sufficient recognition’. The same prize was won in 1927 by Radclyffe Hall for her novel *Adam’s Breed*.

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Webb declares in her 'Foreword' to *Precious Bane* (1924) that Shropshire is 'a country where the dignity' of 'ancient things lingers long'.¹⁰ Webb's Shropshire is an embattled enclave, a site of precious memory whose imagined borders delineate topographical and somatic restrictions. This borderland also resonates with contested conceptions of Englishness, a rediscovery of place and stable location triggered by what Webb deemed a poisonous modernity whose dynamism of progressive enlightenment, coupled with unthinking veneration for mobility, had induced a split between the self and the environment, effacing the need for persistence and settled rhythm: '[w]hen antique things are also country things, they are easier to write about, for there is a permanence, a continuity in country life which makes the lapse of centuries seem of little moment' (*PB*, p. 6). This connotes that Webb immortalizes the mental as well as physical heirlooms of a parochial past whilst the newest theories encroach with predatory pervasiveness on the ordered calm of her fictional milieu. But her portrayal of Shropshire as a locus rich in folklore, myth, and arcane superstition does not ape that 'highly idealised form of escape from urbanity'¹¹ which Hardy castigates in the fey bourgeois-bohemian Angel Clare, whose affliction is an especially virulent strain of that 'English disease, a love of Nature'.¹² Indeed, Webb's sombre reworking of Persephone in *Gone to Earth* as a story about 'the age-long terror of weakness bound and helpless beneath the knife' (*GE*, p. 216) was explicitly shaped by the climate of 'all things hunted and snared and destroyed' (*GE*, p. 17) in the Great War.¹³ Her literary rendering of the Shropshire terrain, while it urgently searches for an inspiring vision of pastoralised domesticity, is fraught with a feeling for spectral presences and the almost extinct: the fantasy of a coherent community is caught in a process of endless and depressing deferral.

Although intensely local in setting and detail, *Gone to Earth* cannot be dissociated from 'the horrors of the War',¹⁴ seeping into Webb's imagery of Hazel Woodus as 'a tiny figure in chaos' travelling through a woodland in which branches splinter with 'loud reports like gun-fire' (*GE*, p. 259) and 'gravestones [...] creeping as if they would dominate the world' (*GE*, p. 276). These unnerving intimations were barely registered by those who first

¹⁰ Webb avers elsewhere that 'many ideas of humanity expressed [...] in folklore [...] are immortal, shining out like lamps beyond their dark century'. See *Collected Prose and Poems*, ed. and intro. by Gladys Mary Coles (Shrewsbury: Wilding, 1977), p. 39.

¹¹ Williamson, 'Portrait of Mary Butts', 188-89.

¹² Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (New York: Harcourt, 1956), p. 143.

¹³ See Gladys Mary Coles, *The Flower of Light: A Biography of Mary Webb* (London: Duckworth, 1978), p. 158.

¹⁴ Webb, 'The Wayfaring Tree', in *Collected Prose and Poems*, ed. and intro. by Gladys Mary Coles, p. 89.

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championed Webb’s regional fiction. John Buchan, lamenting the disintegration of popular village culture ‘in pagan harmony with the deeper rhythms of existence’,¹⁵ saw in Webb’s oeuvre a blossoming evergreen England, replete with the familiar forms of rural life, as the sole remaining repository of peace. Buchan construed the Webb of *Gone to Earth* as a cultural embalmer, measuring the relaxed and artless routines of a sheltered agrarian order against a blighted consumerist epoch:

Gone to Earth was published in the dark days of 1917 [...] I read it at a time when everything that concerned the soil of England seemed precious, and one longed for the old things as a relief from a world too full of urgent novelties.¹⁶

To Buchan the novel appeared so devoid of ‘urgent’ contemporaneous reference that he dated *Gone to Earth*’s milieu approximately fifty years earlier, in the 1870s, despite a passage clearly stating that the novel’s events occur after 1909.

What Buchan signally failed to mention is how *Gone to Earth* divulges instead a writer employing the Persephone myth to investigate critically the relationship between insular atavisms and the outbreak of global conflict. This was also a key concern for Jane Harrison in her volume *Alpha and Omega: Essays from Experience*, published in 1915, two years before Webb’s novel. Harrison renounced her earlier enthusiasm for the irrational in ‘Epilogue on the War’, an essay that conveys deep disenchantment about the early stage of the conflict.¹⁷ Until the war, she had appraised collectivism as the solution to the exclusive promptings of love and sex: ‘[h]uman life [...] is lived to the full only in and through the “herd” – [it] is social’.¹⁸ She diagnoses that at the close of the nineteenth century, ‘Man rose up from the banquet of reason and law unfed. He hungered half unconsciously for the herd. It seemed an *impasse*: on the one side orthodoxy, tradition, authority, practical slavery; on the other science, individual freedom, reason, and an aching loneliness’.¹⁹ In her major works, she had traced the origins of Greek religion to pre-Olympian chthonic cults and saw them as superior to classical

¹⁵ James W. Tuttleton, *Vital Signs: Essays on American Literature and Criticism* (Chicago: Dee, 1996), p. 298.

¹⁶ Buchan, ‘Introduction’, *Gone to Earth*, p. i.

¹⁷ The ‘Epilogue’ was published in pamphlet form as *Peace with Patriotism* (Cambridge) in 1915, and included in *Alpha and Omega* the same year. In *Alpha and Omega*, the essay is dated December 1914. Some themes in this essay foreshadowed those of the post-war *Epilegomena*. In 1914, Harrison was at the apex of her academic career, but the war destroyed her settled life in Cambridge and shattered the international community she had shared with German and French scholars. The situation utterly demoralised Harrison, and ‘for nearly ten years, I never opened a Greek book’. Quoted in Peacock, ‘From “Epilogue” to *Epilegomena*’, 191.

¹⁸ Harrison, ‘Homo Sum’, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 16.

¹⁹ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 35.

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religion because they represented emotion, group unity, and matriarchy, while the later Olympian pantheon signalled an autocracy of reason, egoism, and patriarchal privilege. Like the religion it fostered, the matriarchal social group was, she contended, inclusive and emotionally fulfilling.

In 1914, however, Harrison's earlier promulgation of emotion in the abstract and the sacrifice of individual appetites for the communal good was ruthlessly revised by the appalling actuality of wartime chauvinism, and her 'Epilogue', the final essay in *Alpha and Omega*, appealed for moderation, sober self-analysis, and dignified restraint:

[f]or five long years, in season and out, I have preached collectivism – its relation to life and religion, its inspirations, its perils [...] Nowadays, collectivism is not only booming as a fashionable dogma; it is – a conquest far more significant – astir in every man's heart.²⁰

Harrison perceived the Great War as a barbaric conflict of collectivities, in which a younger generation's emotional craving fuelled the distressing extremes of a raw, sabre-rattling nationalism:

[y]ou are to draw your inspiration from your local soil, from the very chairs and tables and clocks and mirrors of your ancestral home [...] Before all things be local, parochial, patriotic [...] cultivate the small, combative herd-emotions.²¹

This is the other side of regional belonging to which *Gone to Earth* is especially attuned.

To Buchan, Webb's fictional Shropshire is regenerative, even redemptive, suturing the wounds of a shell-shocked society. But Webb also manifests that petty provincialism mobilises bellicose herd-instinct and mass support for the prosecution of war. Whether it is the marauding huntsmen who harry Hazel Woodus to her death in the quarry of *Gone to Earth* or the morbidly superstitious villagers in *Precious Bane*, equally ready for a bull-baiting or to lynch Prudence Sarn for a witch, Webb is damning in her scorn for the coarse, parochial 'crowd-morality' that is easily swayed to set definite boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Thus she teases out, as Harrison does in 'Epilogue',²² the links between mawkish sentimentality for the sacred soil

²⁰ Harrison, 'Epilogue', *Alpha and Omega*, pp. 243-45.

²¹ Harrison, 'Homo Sum', *Alpha and Omega*, p. 7.

²² Harrison's 'Epilogue on the War' says much about how she confronted the shortcomings of her own earlier anthropological theories. She had posited 'society' as a collective against the narrow exclusive family, and as a counter to the selfish interests of families she had exalted the social group. She had not considered that there might be stages of collective identity, and that between the individualistic priorities of the family and the all-encompassing, communal drives of humanity, lay nations governed by states that, for their own reasons and by highly effective

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of a rustic ‘home’ and the abhorrent ideologies anchored in a bitterly divisive and deleterious concept of national identity:

It is the mass-ego that constructs dogmas and laws; for while the individual soul is, if free at all, self-poised, the mass-mind is always uncertain, driven by vague, wandering aims; conscious, in a dim fashion, of its own weakness, it builds round itself a grotesque structure in the everlastingness of which it implicitly believes [...] The whole effort of evolution is to the development of individual souls who will dare to be free of the architecture of crowd-morality. For when man is herded he remembers the savage.²³

For Webb, the Persephone myth articulates her basic perception of historical crisis. Although ravaged by the dark god in the mythic source material, poisoned by his food, having taken his seeds, Persephone returns from the underworld pregnant by death, but from this pregnancy comes not the horror of a spectral limbo state, but reintegration of mortality into life. The patriarchal rule that infects, brutalises and kills has been recycled through the feminine power it sought to rob and is bent back into her service. This corresponds to Virginia Woolf’s conception of a resilient matriarchal deity in *Mrs Dalloway* who moves from profound malaise and uncertainty to triumph, a source of spiritual reaffirmation.²⁴ *Gone to Earth* rebuts this interpretation with its final depiction of ‘loathing’ for ‘all created things’ (*GE*, p. 273). For Webb, the ‘dark places’ at ‘the very core of art and its substance’ (*GE*, p. 13) bespeak the ephemeral, even illusory nature of human happiness. In the ‘Foreword’ to *Precious Bane*, Webb constructs herself as a modern-day Persephone, a tormented oracular priestess subject to exceptional conditions, whose thought-adventures oscillate between the two worlds of provincial past and hectic, directionless present. However, this movement only buttresses a stark sense of flux and frailty:

[t]he past is only the present become invisible and mute; and because it is invisible and mute, its memoried glances and its murmurs are infinitely precious. We are tomorrow’s past. Even now we slip away like those pictures painted on the moving dials of antique clocks – a ship, a cottage, sun and moon, a nosegay. (*PB*, p. 6)

Webb, like her literary mentor Hardy, positions herself at a cultural crossroads, keenly responsive to the dislocating complexities of modernity, yet driven by a grave historical responsibility to remember and record dying rural traditions. Webb explains that

means, foster a collective identity that transmits, and exacerbates, the savageries of patriotic herd-instinct.

²³ Mary Webb, *The House of Dormer Forest* (London, 1922), pp. 16-17.

²⁴ This is illustrated most succinctly by Clarissa Dalloway who possesses ‘a virginity preserved through childbirth’ (p. 29). See *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. with introd. Hermione Lee (Oxford: The World’s Classics, 1986), p. 29. Hereafter referred to as *MD*.

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[t]he [protagonist] of a country story must be instinct with the countryside: it is in his [or her] very bones. So it must always be in a novel that attempts the interpretation of earth through character. For the dwellers in mountain and forest are under this burden, that they must unconsciously express those dumb masses and forces that have no other voice than theirs. No novel of the countryside can attain greatness unless it unifies its characters with the earth.²⁵

Gone to Earth does not simplify or sanitise the ‘instinct with the countryside’ that Hazel Woodus personifies, nor does it offer a sanguine account of ‘those dumb [...] forces’ that she strives to decode. However much Webb’s rapt nature writings extol the virtues of the ‘unseen’ and a mysticism that promises escape from the prison-house of conscious thought, *Gone to Earth* implies that the irrational and instinctual, seemingly associated with the copious bucolic terrain, can become a source of domestic abuse, even martial viciousness and internecine strife.

II

Hazel’s plight in *Gone to Earth* signifies the fundamental ‘change from maid to wife’ (*GE*, p. 255) underpinning the Persephone myth, and its illustration of the ‘ever-circling wheels of birth, mating, death’ (*GE*, p. 257). At the outset, Hazel is glimpsed as a guileless embodiment of the virginal nature-goddess, her childhood a safeguarded physical space:

[s]unlight, soft airs, bright colours, kindness – these were beneficent havens to flee into. Such was the essence of her [Hazel’s] creed, the only creed she held, and it lay darkly in her heart, never expressed even to herself. (*GE*, p. 17)

Now that the dew was gone, and cobwebs no longer canopied the field with silver, it was blue with germander speedwell – each flower painted with deepening colour, eyes with startling white, and carrying on slender stamens the round white pollen-balls – worlds of silent, lovely activity. Every flower-spike had its family of buds, blue jewels splashed with white, each close-folded on her mystery. [...] [Hazel] had no words for the wonder in which she walked. But she felt it, she enjoyed it with a passion no words could express. (*GE*, p. 165)

Webb insists upon the associations between Persephone as a goddess of flowers and the elemental patterns of Hazel’s daily existence: ‘when she gathered flowers and lay in the sun, she was dwelling in a mystical atmosphere’ (*GE*, p. 17). She begins the novel as a maiden, ‘as sexless as a leaf’ (*GE*, p. 16), occupied like the deity with gathering blossoms in the open fields (*GE*, p. 17). In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Persephone disports

²⁵ Webb quoted in Thomas Moulton, *Mary Webb: Her Life and Work* (London, 1932), p. 280.

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with the daughters of Okeanos at the remote reaches of the earth.²⁶ Among the flowers she picks is the seductive narcissus, which Gaia causes to bloom by the will of Zeus as a deception for the maiden. When she reaches for it, the earth opens, and Hades springs out and seizes her against her will. Thus the fragrance of the ‘narcissi on the window-sills’ has a peculiar resonance in Webb’s novel.²⁷

The narcissi on the window-sills eyed Hazel in a white silence, and their dewy golden eyes seemed akin to [...] her own. The fragrance of spring flowers filled the place with wistful sadness. There are no scents so [...] grievous, as the scent of valley-lilies and narcissi clustered ghostly by the dark garden hedge, and white lilac, freighted with old dreams [...] faintly reminiscent of mysterious lost ecstasy. (*GE*, p. 139)

Webb underscores the intractability of this ‘lost ecstasy’ (*GE*, p. 139)²⁸ by elaborating the intricate patterns of sacrificial imagery so prominent in *Tess*, in which the eponymous heroine is made to feel ‘like a hunted criminal’, living ‘in perpetual fear that someone might discover that she was an unmarried mother’.²⁹ Webb sharpens Hardy’s technique of employing some of the emblems of Demeter and Persephone – flowers and a basket of fruit – to link his young heroine to the unified divinity. Tess’s most inimitable trait is her ‘flower-like mouth’, and she carries a ‘bunch of white flowers’ (*Tess*, p. 19) in her left hand during the Marlott procession. After visiting Alec

²⁶ The Okeanidai, or daughters of Okeanos, are water deities (as is Kore in some contexts) who like the nymphs, guard and solace the young. In other versions of the myth, and in Persephone’s later version of the story in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (ll. 417-24), the powerful virgin goddesses Pallas (Athena) and Artemis are also present at the abduction.

²⁷ In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* Gaia grows the narcissus as a trap for Persephone at Zeus’s behest (‘the narcissus, / which Earth grew as a snare for the flower-faced maiden / in order to gratify by Zeus’s design the Host-to-Many [Hades]’ ll. 7-9). Gaia, the earth and ultimate parent of Persephone as of everything, is a shadowy, scarcely anthropomorphised figure in the *Hymn*. Of the flowers picked by Persephone in the *Homeric Hymn*, the narcissus, like many other flowers that grow from bulbs and produce fruits, was thought to be an aphrodisiac. These flowers are known to have developed underworld associations. The flower was thought to have soporific qualities (the root *nark-* in *narkissos* suggests torpor and death). By calling the narcissus *athurma*, ‘toy’ (l. 16) the poet of the *Homeric Hymn* signals the toys that brides dedicate to Artemis on the eve of their weddings. Here, Persephone is giving up her childhood, her narcissus, her toy. However, she is not completely resigned to growing up in the *Hymn*: as she is carried off, she shrieks for help (l. 20). Whereas the impulse to pick the narcissus is a narrative reflection of her wish to leave childhood behind, the cry for assistance implies the conflicting desire to remain a child. On the ‘rich and varied’ symbolism of the narcissus see Ann Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate*, pp. 54-57.

²⁸ Webb’s notion of ‘ecstasy’ evolves perhaps out of a Paterian mysticism that seeks a visionary, epiphanic access to truth, a keynote of the young Pound’s notion of ‘ecstasy’ which ‘is not a whirl or a madness of the senses, but a glow arising from the exact nature of the perception’. Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 91.

²⁹ Helen Deutsch, *The Psychology of Women*, 2 vols (New York: Gune and Stratton, 1945), II, p. 353.

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d'Urberville she suddenly blushes at the spectacle of 'roses at her breast; roses in her hat; roses and strawberries in her basket to the brim' (*Tess*, p. 47). Alec take Tess to the 'fruit-garden' where he feeds her strawberries of the 'British Queen' variety, then adorns Tess's hat and basket of fruit with roses, giving her some also, 'to put in her bosom'. The 'British Queen' strawberries symbolically doom Tess to return near the end of the novel as Alec's Queen, his paid mistress, at the chic Sandbourne resort, recalling the pomegranate seeds that Hades tricks Persephone into eating to guarantee that she will return to the nether realm and rule as his 'Queen' for one-third of the year. This foreshadows Hazel who 'sat like a queen in a regalia of flowers, eating the piece of bread and honey that made her dinner, and covering her face with lily pollen' (*GE*, p. 19).³⁰

Webb's nature writing confronts 'the horrible story of the progressive ruin of our landscape'³¹ by using mythic structures and strenuous insistence upon nature's ultimately curative and munificent properties. Webb's brooding attentiveness to the particularities of her rustic milieu is reminiscent of Pater's 'double sight [...] clairvoyant of occult gifts in common or uncommon things, in the reed at the brook-side.'³²

[o]n some day of late January, when the honey-coloured west is full of soft grey cloud [...] what is the thrill that shakes us? It is not only that the delicate traceries of silver birches are tenderly dark on the illumined sky, that a star springs out of it like darting quick-silver, that the music of tone and tint has echoed last April's song. It is something deeper than these. It is the sudden sense – keen and startling – of oneness with all beauty, seen and unseen. This sense is so misted over that it only comes clearly at such times. When it does come, we are in complete communion with the universal life.³³

This 'complete communion' with the 'unseen' finds expression through organic imagery steeped in a conception of Englishness that E. M. Forster augments through his own 'vistas' of the 'unseen' in *Howards End*.³⁴ Webb

³⁰ Persephone's flowerlike face in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (l. 8) associates her with the plants she picks. Through her identification with flora and the growth of plants in a seasonal cycle, Persephone is also, mythically speaking, an appropriate consort for an underworld deity, for the seed with which she is identified in later myth and cult disappears and reappears from beneath the ground.

³¹ Mary Butts, *Warning to Hikers*, in *Ashe of Rings' and Other Writings* (London and New York: McPherson, 1998), p. 269. Hereafter referred to as *WH*.

³² Pater, 'Leonardo da Vinci', *The Renaissance*, p. 113.

³³ Webb, 'Vis Medicatrix Naturae', in *The Spring of Joy* (London, 1928), p. 128. Webb revisits this imagery in her essay 'The Core of Poetry' in which she asks, '[w]hat is this mysterious thing that inhabits the depths of man? [...] It holds communion also with the emotions, but it is greater than they are – greater than the whole sum of them.' See Webb, 'The Core of Poetry', in *Collected Prose and Poems*, p. 38.

³⁴ E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, ed. by Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989). Hereafter referred to as *HE*.

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comments that ‘one must “greet the unseen” [...] in awed and humble silence’.³⁵ More importantly, she echoes Jane Harrison’s enterprise in *Themis* ‘to restore by *communion* that *complete* unity’ (my emphasis) with the ‘Great Mother’ of Nature which has been steadily corroded through patriarchal enculturation.³⁶ Mary Butts’s 1932 pamphlet *Traps for Unbelievers* is also driven by an avid yearning to secure ‘the unseen [...] the whole complex of emotions we call the religious attitude’, a feminised conception of religious experience that defies the standards of expository discourse: ‘[i]t has something to do with a sense of the invisible, the non-existent in a scientific sense, relations between things of a different order: the moon and a stone, the sea and a piece of wood’.³⁷ In trying to capture this ineffable primitive apprehension, Butts musters only tentative approximations to avow femininity as a site of intoxicating alterity.³⁸

Adapting the conventional trope of woman as landscape, Webb’s essays manifest how the ‘mystical’ (*GE*, p. 17) is firmly anchored in southwest England, whose ‘ritual of earth’³⁹ is infused by an aggressively feminised collective unconscious.⁴⁰ A cursory reading of ‘Vis Medicatrix Naturae’ connotes that Webb’s mystical theories portend Butts’s sense of women’s historical elision by manipulating matriarchal prehistory and ‘the sacramental love of Nature’ (*GE*, p. 255) to reposition her female protagonists within the national narrative as indistinguishable from, or continuous with their verdant surroundings. Yet *Gone to Earth* signifies that the possession of elemental, intrinsic, and untrammelled links with both seen and unseen, occupying what Sylvia Townsend Warner terms a ‘secret place between two worlds’,⁴¹ does not enable Hazel to become an earth-goddess or an imperious transmitter of cultural renewal. Instead of enhancing her chances of survival, Hazel’s instinctual awareness fetters her to a setting that offers little succour to those in touch with its magical undercurrents.

³⁵ Webb, ‘New Year Customs’, *Collected Prose and Poems*, p. 39.

³⁶ Harrison, *Themis*, p. 539.

³⁷ Mary Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers*, in *‘Ashe of Rings’ and Other Writings* (New York and London: McPherson, 1998), pp. 9, 34, 25. Hereafter referred to as *TFU*.

³⁸ See Laura Doyle, *Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

³⁹ Webb, ‘The Joy of Motion’, in *‘Poems’ and ‘The Spring of Joy’*, pp. 149–50.

⁴⁰ See Kristin M. Mapel, *Tracing Arachne’s Web: Myth and Feminist Fiction* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001).

⁴¹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The True Heart* (London: Viking Press, 1929), p. 25.

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III

Initial reviews of *Gone to Earth* hint that Webb's preoccupation with the 'unseen' only partially veils a project to retreat into an ahistorical elsewhere, outside the loop of time. Webb is fashioned as the laureate of a fading Shropshire tradition; her supposed respect for a lost rural paradise becomes a mode of lotus-eating intended to narcotize her readership, making them forget the privations of the Great War. However, the numinous experience that the Persephone myth encapsulates for Webb, such as 'oneness with all beauty', operates as a means of scrutinising, rather than evading, received notions of gender, class, nationhood and sexuality. The typical Webb heroine is abraded by her inherited position of cultural liminality, and so alertness to 'unseen' presences, compensates for the restrictions imposed on a female subject by her severely curtailed citizenship rights.

Glen Cavaliero argues that Hazel Woodus, blithely unresponsive to even the simplest Christian orthodoxy, approximates to 'a kind of earth-spirit'.⁴² This signifies that Webb's protagonist is fully conscious of access into what Dorothy Richardson calls 'the mystery of space'.⁴³ For Hazel, 'the wild was her kingdom' (*GE*, pp. 161-62); under 'the pale green larch-trees, in her bright dress, with her crown of tawny hair, she seemed to be an incarnation of the secret woods' (*GE*, p. 54). As well as evoking Jane Harrison's version of the Mother deity as 'Lady of the Wild Things' (*PGR*, p. 263), Webb renders the undisturbed, spontaneous sense of native belonging, bound up with the genius of place in 'Vis Medicatrix Naturae':

we are swept up into the wild heart of the wild. Then we know that we are not merely built up physically out of flower, feather and light, but are one with them in every fibre of our being. Then only do we have our full share in the passion of life that fills all nature; then only do we possess perfect vitality. Then we are caught into the primal beauty of earth.⁴⁴

Gone to Earth does not invest sufficient faith in its heroine as a magisterial priestess who can effortlessly enter a realm of temporal simultaneity, to be as Dorothy Richardson records, 'perfectly in two places at once';⁴⁵ nor does Webb manifest unshakeable belief in Persephone's exultant return to a

⁴² Glen Cavaliero, *The Rural Tradition and the English Novel 1900-1930* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 138.

⁴³ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* (London: Virago, 1979), IV, p. 648.

⁴⁴ Webb, 'Vis Medicatrix Naturae', *The Spring of Joy*, p. 128.

⁴⁵ Dorothy Richardson, 'Confessions', *Little Review*, 12 (1929), 70.

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spoiled rural milieu that her lyrical nature writings seem to forecast.⁴⁶ Instead of affirming the note of ‘loving rapture’⁴⁷ Walter De La Mare commended in Webb’s essays, *Gone to Earth* seizes upon Hardy’s prevailingly sombre and cheerless mythic allusions in *Tess*, not just to highlight women’s ‘lost-and-forgotten lives’ (PB, p. 93) in general, but to augur the unthinking slaughter of a fertility figure:

[Hazel] stood in the lane above the cottage, which nestled below with its roof on a level with the hedge-roots, and watched the sun dip. The red light from the west stained her torn old dress, her thin face, her eyes, till she seemed to be dipped in blood (GE, p. 14).

Ezra Pound’s essay ‘Psychology and Troubadours’ (1916), canvassing the question of why Greek myths emerge, furnishes an incisive commentary on Webb’s literary ‘understanding’ of ‘Persephone and Demeter’:

I believe in a sort of permanent basis in humanity, that is to say, I believe that Greek myth arose when someone having passed through a delightful psychic experience tried to communicate it to others and found it necessary to screen himself from persecution. Speaking aesthetically, the myths are explications of mood: you may stop there, or you may probe deeper. Certain it is that these myths are only intelligible in a vivid and glittering sense to those people to whom they occur. I know, I mean, one man who understands Persephone and Demeter, and one who understands the Laurel, and another, who has, I should say, met Artemis. These things are for them *real*.⁴⁸

If Hazel is the *real* incarnation of the ‘wild’ and ‘secret woods’ (GE, p. 54), mirroring its fluctuating moods, she also personifies specific myths and legends of that Shropshire terrain with which she is allied. Yet these local legends, contrasting with Pound’s ‘vivid and glittering sense’, replicate and reinforce the dreary limitations on body and mind in which Hazel is snared. Webb’s Shropshire countryside in *Gone to Earth* rarely confers upon Hazel that elemental potency – a ‘miracle’ we eternally ‘desire and adore’ dwelling ‘in the comet, in the heart of a bird, and the flying dust of pollen’⁴⁹ – which could guarantee her wellbeing in what is on occasions a hostile environment whose remotest corners supply ample refuge to the very tormentors who eventually destroy her. Webb’s subversive use of the trope of rural Shropshire as *motherland* connotes that Hazel’s environs, far from being ‘the unfenced wild’ (GE, p. 12) of a maternal and nutritive sacred place, are in

⁴⁶ The female modernist interest in the conjunction between landscape and mysticism owes much to the pervasiveness of the ‘spiritual culture of landscape’ and its links to citizenship. See David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), p. 84.

⁴⁷ Walter De La Mare, ‘Introduction’ to ‘*Poems*’ and ‘*The Spring of Joy*’, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Ezra Pound, ‘Psychology and Troubadours’, in *The Spirit of Romance*, 2nd edn (Owen, 1970), p. 70.

⁴⁹ Webb, ‘Vis Medicatrix Naturae’, *The Spring of Joy*, p. 128.

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fact the figurative walls within which she is incarcerated. Unable to extricate herself from the material grip of the natural world, she becomes 'enchained by earth, prisoner to it only a little less than the beech and the hyacinth' (*GE*, p. 71). Poetry, for Webb, 'is the subconscious self breaking from its prison of silence and finding its way through the mazes of the written word'.⁵⁰ Hazel lacks any propensity to attain this mode of 'release'.

In her essays Webb's identification with the natural environment validates her permeability but without vitiating her specificity or cultural agency as a privileged translator, and priestly communicant with, her Shropshire locale. In *Gone to Earth*, by contrast, Webb signals how Hazel's relationship with her native region works to efface, rather than amplify, a sense of the female self as a singular, sentient, and liberated entity. Hazel, according to John Buchan, is the 'protector of all wounded and persecuted things [...] at once the offspring of the mysterious landscape, and the interpretation of it'.⁵¹ Yet Webb's Persephone is immovably fixed in place without ever being deemed its legitimate heir.

If Hazel is interchangeable with the land, then the woods epitomise the clammy confinement of a narrow cell from which emancipation is 'futile' (*GE*, p. 11). Prue Sarn, the canny and determined heroine of Webb's *Precious Bane*, writes herself into the annals of a regional chronicle by foregrounding her appreciation for the ancestral past and her unfeigned delight in a long legacy of folk-stories that comprises the domestic, the everyday, and the familial. Prue coaxes into words her myriad sense-impressions so that she can unify and enshrine them into a single overarching narrative. Hazel though has inherited some of her dead mother's 'incapacity for expression' (*GE*, p. 13), lacking the means to memorialise her own 'poor private voice'.⁵² Moreover, there is no beneficent Demeter to offer Webb's protagonist sustenance or education. *Gone to Earth* addresses how biological parents as well as surrogate guardians fail miserably in their tasks of care and instruction for life: Hazel has not so much been raised by her widowed father Abel, as grudgingly permitted to grow. This contrasts with Tess Durbeyfield, who counteracts the grievous shortcomings of her parents by assuming onerous maternal duties over her younger siblings.

Gone to Earth foregrounds the motif of a doomed fertility figure imbuing Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders* and *Tess*. When Hazel sings at the local chapel, it evokes 'the grief of rainy forests and the

⁵⁰ Webb, 'The Core of Poetry', *Collected Prose and Poems*, p. 37.

⁵¹ Buchan, 'Introduction', in *Gone to Earth*, pp. i-ii.

⁵² This notion of the 'poor, private voice' is taken from Virginia Woolf's early story 'The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn' (1906) that constructs a chronicle of national belonging in which women are central. See *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Dick (New York: Harcourt, 1985), p. 33.

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moan of stormy water; the muffled complaint of driven leaves [...] Hazel expressed things that she knew nothing of, as a blackbird does' (*GE*, p. 76). In what seems like a deliberate echo of *The Woodlanders*, Webb measures the timbre of her protagonist's voice against the utterance of a dying Giles Winterborne, the ineffectual 'priest' of the Wessex orchards. Once aligned with the fecundity of the Hintocks, the delirious Winterborne dissolves into the sylvan surroundings by imperceptible degrees:

[There] were low mutterings; at first like persons in conversation, but gradually resolving themselves into varieties of one voice. It was an endless monologue, like that we sometimes hear from inanimate nature in deep secret places where water flows, or where ivy leaves flap against stones; but by degrees [Grace] was convinced that the voice was Winterborne's. (*Woodlanders*, p. 235)

Webb's subtle invocations of *The Woodlanders* resurface through Hazel's exultant immersion in her lush locality, her susceptibility to how the 'wood-pigeons spoke [...] a language older than the oldest scripts of man' (*GE*, p. 155), conjuring up an Emersonian 'Nature' where 'all mean egotism vanishes' and the 'greatest delight which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable'.⁵³

Ancient hedges hung above the field and spoke to her in fragrant voices. The glory of the may was just giving place to the shell-tint of wild roses. [...] She had so deep a kinship with the trees, so intuitive a sympathy with leaf and flower, that it seemed as if the blood in her veins was not slow-moving human blood, but volatile sap. (*GE*, p. 163)

Gone to Earth creates an almost religious yearning for the numinous bond presumed to exist between Hazel and the 'trees', even as it repeatedly punishes her for this affinity. If Webb cannot resist stylizing Hazel here, it is enacted to underscore the extent to which the protagonist's ostensibly 'deep kinship' with her organically abundant milieu is only at best a brittle poetic guise. This adds poignancy to the novel's primary aim: to chart the persecution and ruin of a benign nature-spirit whose reality we can no longer accept. This recalls Hardy's tutelary nymph of the Hintocks, Marty South, and the 'wood-god' Giles Winterborne, who commune with their all-enclosing forest domain through a shared intuitive apprehension of a secret 'script' peculiar to their homeland:

The casual glimpses which the ordinary population bestowed upon that wondrous world of sap and leaves called the Hintock woods had been with these two, Giles and Marty, a clear gaze. They had been possessed of its finer mysteries as of commonplace knowledge; had been able to read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing; to them the sights

⁵³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1971-87), I, p. 140.

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and sounds of night [...] amid those dense boughs [...] were simple occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws they foreknew [...] they had, with the run of the years, mentally collected those remoter signs and symbols which seen in few were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet [...] The artifices of the seasons were seen by them from the conjuror's own point of view. (*Woodlanders*, pp. 248-49)

Webb inverts the hierarchy of unvarnished rustic simplicity and urban sophistication to signal how Hazel's 'primitive womanhood' (*GE*, p. 282), and her 'kinship with the trees', might be superior to, and cleansing for a masculinised state whose competitive and overly mechanized processes had culminated in a war that Jane Harrison termed in 1915 as 'a savagery – a setback to civilisation'.⁵⁴ In Hardy's fictional scheme however – as in Webb's – the 'mystic' figures cannot endure in a forest setting undergoing socio-economic upheaval. *Gone to Earth*'s Persephone is infused with little of Willa Muir's messianic fervour, predicting in 1926 that 'the really creative New Woman' can break through the most intractable barriers to national inclusion and construct 'a feminine State'.⁵⁵

IV

Hazel Woodus possesses a hoydenish vivacity that captures the attention of two contrasting male figures in *Gone to Earth*: the reticent non-conformist minister Edward Marston and the yeoman-squire Jack Reddin, who subjects Hazel to the irrational derangement of sexual passion.⁵⁶ Marston is discomposed by Hazel's apparent ignorance of his peculiar brand of Christianity, but is awed by what he thinks is her lack of guile or flirtatiousness. As she sings, her head wound with a wreath of violets, her hair in tendrils about her face, Marston hears in her voice: 'the keening [...] of life for the perishing matter it inhabits' (*GE*, p. 57). Marston has lived a coddled and attenuated life, and believing that Hazel needs steady guidance, marries her, but with mistaken altruism he denies his own physical passion and does not consummate the marriage. Webb never lets us forget, as Marston certainly does, that he views in Hazel's personality what he wants to perceive if he is to be temporarily liberated from the chronic melancholy of his outlook. D. H. Lawrence's judicious reading of Angel Clare also throws into sharp relief the dynamics of Marston's temperament: 'the female in

⁵⁴ Harrison, 'Epilogue', p. 7.

⁵⁵ Willa Muir, *Women: An Inquiry*, 2 vols (New York: Knopf, 1926), II, p. 21.

⁵⁶ Coles writes in her introduction to the 1978 reprint of *Gone to Earth* that the two men who pursue the heroine personify 'the opposing physical and spiritual values between which Hazel swings'. See Coles, 'Introduction', *Gone to Earth*, p. 6.

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himself is detestable, the body, the senses, that which he will share with a woman, is held degraded'.⁵⁷

Marston has been compelled through upbringing and vocation to espouse the chivalric maxim that counsels repression of bodily imperatives. He equates sexual appetite with sexual knowledge; therefore, he cannot comprehend that his own desires for his future wife Hazel, though expressed in sincerely tender terms, would be anything but repulsive to her. Marston anxiously tries to disavow the palpable actuality of the female body. The Hades figure Jack Reddin, on the other hand, often sees little beyond the 'over-virility' (*GE*, p. 256) to which he yields out of malicious boredom. Webb conceives Reddin's exploitative sensualism as a genuinely 'wild' force (*GE*, p. 54): he is neither integrated with nor trammelled by the woodland, and he effortlessly desecrates its pagan survivals and its women.⁵⁸ His compulsive denial of any sympathy with or dependence upon others signifies 'a quite unconscious brutality' given that 'women, servants, and animals were in the world' only for his 'benefit' (*GE*, p. 211). His crass opportunism ironically demonstrates his fitness to survive the vicissitudes that his own disruptive energies stir into action. Hazel's apparent independence from the prescribed sexual and social roles of a genteel, moneyed milieu drives Reddin to distraction with the need to possess her. Neither Marston nor Reddin is himself complete, and neither figure can supply Hazel with the encouragement she requires to negotiate the spiteful and deadening demands of a community that thinks the formation of a nuclear family the highest achievement of evolution.

The pointed contrast between Reddin and Marston is fundamental to Webb's narrative structure: both characters have an arresting individuality that takes them beyond stark thematic function as representatives of opposing physical and spiritual principles. This struggle between natural forces recalls Tess Durbeyfield trapped between the over-refined delicacy of the asexual Christian Angel Clare and the outspoken passion of the sleazy *arriviste* Alec d'Urberville. Hazel's sexuality makes her into a commodity or mere trinket for Marston, an object that, once seduced by Reddin, is rendered tawdry and shop-soiled (in a plot device that clearly echoes Clare's rejection of Tess after his appalled discovery of her 'impurity'). Indeed Webb's Jack Reddin, who 'had taken what he wanted of [women] in a kind of animal semi-consciousness' (*GE*, p. 213), and who saw 'nothing outside his own narrow views' (*GE*, p. 256) is a version of the 'satyrs' who populate the imaginative

⁵⁷ D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, ed. by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 97.

⁵⁸ John Buchan's assessment of Reddin is shrewd: '[Reddin's] power over Hazel is due in part to the fact that he, too, is near the elemental world.' See 'Introduction', *Gone to Earth*, p. iii.

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terrain of Hardy's Wessex Novels. These male figures countenance few laws and strictures outside their own craving for immediate self-gratification; beginning with Aeneas Manston (*Desperate Remedies*), Sergeant Troy (*Far from the Madding Crowd*), Edred Fitzpiers (*The Woodlanders*), and culminating in Alec d'Urberville.

Gone to Earth, taking inspiration from Hardy's *Tess*, illustrates how both Marston and Reddin, blinded by egoistic passion, are unable to 'read' accurately and responsibly Hazel's true identity: '[b]oth men saw her [Hazel] as they wanted her to be, not as she was' (*GE*, p. 125). According to Reddin, Hazel 'should not have that easy grace; she should have exchanged it for a matronly bearing by this time, and independence should have yielded to subservience' (*GE*, p. 147). Throughout the novel, Hazel is situated within the natural environment or within a room or window or door, and held there for a time, motionless. This is not simply Webb's lyrical enterprise to mimic Hardy moving in and out of his landscapes with a prescient camera eye, supplying detail in all its sensuous concreteness. In these episodes is another 'unseen' presence. Often it is Reddin spying upon Hazel from every turn with intense minuteness. Unlike 'the women of civilization, who are pursued by looking-glasses', Hazel frequently forgets her own 'appearance' (*GE*, p. 166). But this very indifference stimulates Reddin's 'exercise of force against weakness' (*GE*, p. 167).⁵⁹ Not made 'for the comforts or the duties of social life' (*GE*, p. 257) and wanting neither Reddin nor Marston at first, Hazel soon becomes a divided being: part of her tragedy is that her 'body and soul had been put in opposition by belonging to different men' (*GE*, p. 267). Hazel's needs, awakened but unfulfilled by Marston and untutored by her parents, lead her to Reddin. Sexuality is Hazel's vulnerability: it renders her an object to be quarrelled over and abused; it can result in pregnancy against her will and against her comprehension of the process.

To Edward Marston, Hazel 'held the gaze by the perfection of the picture she made' (*GE*, p. 76). Webb's key concern with this grievous failure of representation evokes Hardy's provocative subtitle in *Tess*, which ironically declares that his 'Pure Woman' is 'faithfully presented'.⁶⁰ Although '[t]o the pure all things are pure' (*GE*, p. 166), Webb knows in *Gone to Earth* how easily that 'purity' can be manipulated and betrayed. When Hazel exclaims,

⁵⁹ This recalls the predicament of Luce Irigaray's daughter figure in the lyrical monologue, 'And the One doesn't stir without the Other', *Signs*, 7 (1) (Autumn 1981): 'I, too, a captive when a man holds me in his gaze; I, too, am abducted from myself. Immobilized in the reflection he expects of me. Reduced to the face he fashions for me [...] Trapped in a single function – mothering'. See Irigaray, 'And the One doesn't stir without the Other', 60-67.

⁶⁰ See Susan Bernstein, 'Confessing and Editing: The Politics of Purity in Hardy's *Tess*', in *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature*, ed. by Lloyd S. Davis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 159-78.

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‘I be like a picture!’ (GE, p. 133), she little realises the scalding irony implicit in this proclamation given that she is ‘deprived of identity’ (GE, p. 194) and re-invented by her suitors to palliate their own petty vanities.

If *Gone to Earth* signifies that ‘[m]arriage kills the mind’ (GE, p. 214), then it also buries the body. The obsessive erotic imaging of Hazel by Marston and Reddin as a visual trinket or trophy, fetishistically focusing on body parts (her hair, mouth, arms and eyes) smothers the ‘real’ woman under a cluttered mass of partial and insidious impressions. As Cramer observes of Jane Harrison’s account of the Homeric Olympus: ‘Goddesses became projections of male desires and fears and lost their power to provide women with models of autonomy and strength’.⁶¹ Nature is colonised by those who, like Angel Clare and Edward Marston, neuter mythic meaning in the process of explicating and idealising it. Hazel thus becomes, in terms borrowed from Elizabeth Bowen, ‘as inanimate and objective as a young girl in a story told by a man’.⁶²

V

When Hazel settles in the cottage home of Edward and his mother Mrs Marston, they have the following conversation:

‘Myths are interesting’, said Edward, ‘especially nature myths.’
‘What’s a myth, Mr. Marston?’ [Hazel asked]
‘An untruth, my dear’, said Mrs. Marston.
(GE, p. 72)

Gone to Earth debunks Mrs Marston’s haughty disavowal of ‘nature myth’ without fully committing itself to a rival perspective that unequivocally endorses the holy beauty of native heath. Webb’s spiteful parody of a caring Demeter, Mrs Marston evinces uncritical adoration of material domesticity and the womanly cult of demure high-mindedness against which Alvina Houghton revolts in *The Lost Girl*. Mrs Marston assumes that Hazel will become the docile, uncomplaining servant of all within her cottage, which is a site devoted to stultifying forms or instruments of civilised culture.⁶³ It is no

⁶¹ P. Cramer, ‘Virginia Woolf’s Patriarchal Family of Origins in *Between the Acts*’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 39 (1993), 173–74.

⁶² Elizabeth Bowen, *The Hotel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 156.

⁶³ In Webb’s *The House in Dormer Forest*, maternal sway and its strictures are successfully eradicated. Those daughters who would perpetuate the maternal power structure by emulating their mothers are drawn as facile and insipid at best; at worst, morally corrupt. Only the daughter who refuses to model herself upon her mother’s example thrives.

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surprise that this blandly passive and conventional-minded widow, who 'uses motherhood for power she cannot find anywhere else',⁶⁴ would repudiate 'nature myths' like Persephone as a distasteful and demeaning 'untruth'. Mrs Marston polices the strict segregation between the outer, public, 'masculine' world and the private, domestic, 'woman's' world, the type of divide cherished by Richard Dalloway in *The Voyage Out* (1915), who relishes being able to return home to his wife in the evening and 'find out that she has spent her day in calling, music, playing with the children, domestic duties'.⁶⁵

Webb suggests that the Demeter-Persephone myth, with its intimations of the mother-child relationship as one between two mutually loving, supportive but autonomous beings, both of whom evolve and mature, is an impossible ideal in *Gone to Earth*.⁶⁶ In the first days of Marston's marriage to Hazel the cottage seems a warm and lighted place of relaxation in the midst of the wild landscape surrounding it on all sides: 'Hazel had never felt so like a child in its mother's lap. Her own mother had not made her feel so [...] But now she felt cared for as she looked round the low room with its chair-bed and little dressing table hung with pink glazed calico' (*GE*, p. 151).⁶⁷ But the house that at first affords Hazel such pleasure is in fact a 'museum of propriety',⁶⁸ where 'people said what they did not mean, and did not say what they meant'.⁶⁹ Mrs Marston expects what Ivy Compton-Burnett terms in unmasking the casual violence channelled through that ostensibly neutral institution, the family hearth: 'instinctive loyalty of service to that rigorous lofty thing, to which we give duty as a name [...] an unfaltering, unquestioning, it may soon be said, unreasoning service'.⁷⁰ Webb adumbrates that the work Hazel is expected to do (household management, cooking) is not necessary to the economic support of a family but are crucial contributions to the maintenance and reproduction of Mrs Marston's imagined class position.

⁶⁴ Phyllis Lassner, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 83.

⁶⁵ Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (Oxford: The World's Classics, 1986), p. 62.

⁶⁶ Webb's embittered portrayal of the surrogate mother Mrs Marston supplies the starkest contrast to the vision of maternal kindness evoked in Jean Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), when Julia Martin, sitting by the bed of her dying mother, remembers that when she was a very young child: '[h]er mother had been the warm centre of the world'. See Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 77.

⁶⁷ See Lynn Walker, 'Women and Architecture', in *Gender, Space, Architecture*, ed. by Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, and Iain Borden (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 254.

⁶⁸ Michèle Aina Barale, *Daughters and Lovers: The Life and Writing of Mary Webb* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), p. 101.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* (1st pub. 1938; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 59.

⁷⁰ Ivy Compton-Burnett, *Dolores* (1st pub. 1911; Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1971), p. 44.

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Webb’s stern indictment of Mrs Marston’s project to remake Hazel as a compliant wife, mother, and household drone, anticipates the stringent portrayal of the wasted lives of daughters locked in the prison of domestic drudgery in Winifred Holtby’s *The Crowded Street* (1924) and Radclyffe Hall’s *The Unlit Lamp* (1924). For Mrs Marston, the mother’s role as female educator is her second greatest source of value within the family; her most vital contribution, of course, is her reproductive potential. Mrs Marston reads from a predictable social script: motherhood is a sacred national duty, an essential component in the preservation of the race. Hazel is thus an uneasy and rebellious presence who, Mrs Marston hopes, will soon settle into quietude, becoming quite literally ‘part of the house’ – matter rather than spirit in a domestic interment:

Hazel would be absorbed into the Marston family, like a new piece of furniture. She would be provided for without being consulted; it would be seen that she did her duty, also without being consulted. She would become [...] the servant of the china and the electro-plate and the furniture, and she would be the means by which Edward’s children would come into the world. (GE, p. 106)

The notion of the female body as a mode of domicile preoccupied Jane Harrison, given the gendered concern that a ‘[woman’s] chief contribution to the work of the world is the management of her home’.⁷¹ But the claustrophobic Marston cottage becomes a coffin in Hazel’s own private hell, similar to the shabby London lodgings that Anna Morgan registers in Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark*: ‘like being in a small, dark box’.⁷² Webb echoes Eleanor Rathbone’s argument that ‘women really do not invariably fit well into the [...] structure of society [...] because that structure has been built by and for the sex which has [...] alone inhabited it’.⁷³ As Polly and her mother remark in *Precious Bane*: ‘an hour from home was an hour in heaven’ (PB, p. 96). Nature withholds dispensations to daughters who refuse maternity; society does not modify its expectations for daughters who rebuff its forms. Harrison, exploring how spatial arrangements perpetuate grievous gender inequities, underscores Webb’s sustained critique of the debilitating effect of masculine space. The ‘institution of the Man’s House’ Harrison avers, rigidly excludes women from contact with the ‘outside world’, and must therefore be reconstituted to acknowledge and sponsor the ‘racial conscience’ of women. By intertwining the domestic with the concept of women’s capacity as

⁷¹ David Jeremiah, *Architecture and Design for the Family in Britain, 1900-70* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 40. For a discussion of ‘home’ as ‘a woman’s place’, see Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 157-72.

⁷² Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (New York: Norton, 1982), p. 25.

⁷³ Eleanor Rathbone, ‘Victory – and after?’, *The Woman’s Leader*, (March 8, 1929).

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visionary custodians of 'the Human Race', Harrison implies the home is a microcosm of the nation. Domesticity, specifically 'the woman's province' of the home, can operate as the ground for radically revising 'the whole body politic'.⁷⁴ This applies to Forster's *Howards End*, in which inheritance of a modest rural estate is synonymous with England's rehabilitation, since in Harrison's scheme women's 'consciousness may yet save' the nation from self-destruction.⁷⁵

Webb cannot underwrite this buoyant prediction since her Persephone's most essential lesson in selfhood consists in her knowledge of her joyless role as a biological link in the chain of patrimonial inheritance. This sobering fact colours the depiction of Hazel's wedding to Marston. On her marriage day Hazel 'went to her bridal in a funeral wreath' (*GE*, p. 132) made by her father Abel and bedecked with spring flowers. Hazel carries in disguise her father's gift of death. She wears a 'white muslin frock' (*GE*, p. 132) that recalls Tess and the aged female celebrants at the Marlott Cerealia, 'the banded ones [...] all dressed in white gowns' (*Tess*, p.19).

The stately May morning, caparisoned in diamonds, full of the solemnity that perfect beauty wears, had come out of the purple mist and shamed the hovel where Hazel dressed for her bridal. The cottage had sunk almost out of recognition in the foam of spring. Ancient lilacs stood about it and nodded purple-coroneted heads across its one chimney [...] The may-tree by the gate knew its perfect moment, covered with crystal buds that shone like rain among the bright green leaves. (*GE*, p. 131)

The refuge which the Marston home vouchsafes Hazel – its wall-hung text promising security – has no place for frank and uncensored debate of sexual matters, given the tacit reverence for the inhibitions of a scrupulous 'delicacy'. Until she is actually raped, Hazel is ignorant of sexuality. Marston, his mother, and Reddin pay no heed to Hazel's assertion that she wants to be treated in her own right as one who seeks neither the dubious benefits of conventional matrimony nor maternity; her own biological mother warned her against these constricting roles as producing only aimless vacuity of mind. Edward Marston falls short not only as a priestly mediator between God and man but also as pastoral educator and spiritual counsel. Similarly the Marlott vicar in *Tess*, for all his glib assurance to the protagonist that her baby will not suffer because of an improvised christening, refuses to give the child a Christian burial, because the self-appointed custodians of village respectability have more sway over his decision than either firm theological conviction or deference to Church hierarchy. The 'fragile soldier and servant' (*Tess*, p. 100), a phrase ironically invoking the *miles christi*, is laid to rest 'at

⁷⁴ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, pp. 109, 135, 123.

⁷⁵ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 136.

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the cost of a shilling and a pint of beer to the sexton, in that shabby corner of God's allotment where He lets the nettles grow' (*Tess*, p. 101). This controlled fury informs Webb's focus on Marston's humourless devotional texts. Neither Mrs Marston, Hazel's surrogate parent, nor surrogate brother/real spouse Edward can instruct Hazel in the physical process that precedes pregnancy. That lesson Hazel learns through Reddin's assault. The Christian religion cherished and enforced by the Marstons exalts maternity but without referring to the 'shameful' and 'unclean' facts which transform the virgin bride into a mother:

The book was one of those affected by Mrs Marston and her kind. It had no relation whatever to life. Its ideals, characters, ethics and crises made up an unearthly whole, which, being entirely useless as a tonic or as a balm, was so much poison. It was impossible to imagine its heroine facing any of the facts of life, or engaging in any of these physical acts to which all humanity is bound, and which need more than resignation – namely, open-eyed honesty – to raise them from a humiliation to a glory. It was impossible to imagine also how the child, which appeared discreetly and punctually on the last page, could have come by its existence, since it certainly, with such unexceptionable parents, could not have been begotten. (*GE*, p. 151)

Like *Tess*, Hazel has scant cause to trust wifehood and maternity given that her own mother staged a 'bitter rebellion' against 'marriage and a settled life' (*GE*, p. 12). Reassurance, solicitude and sexual knowledge – Webb's protagonist is deprived of these influences and is aghast when she ascertains the 'facts' of her own pregnancy and that she will carry a child like its father Reddin. In *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, Susan Peck MacDonald argues that in nineteenth-century fiction mothers tend to be dead, absent, or ineffectual, thus allowing a niche for the daughter to develop her own story. But Webb presents Hazel, who occupies the lowest social and economic level of woodland life, as unable to re-write her own history after her mother's death. Hazel typifies a ruined and exploited human nature that cannot develop *naturally* if it is compelled to serve the demands of a new bourgeois culture and its false consciousness of decorum, chivalry, and sexual correctness. As Hardy's *Tess* signifies, the feckless and negligent mother Joan Durbeyfield can bequeath to the daughter only her own paralysis, her own chafing disappointment and victimhood – and the daughter who knows no other pattern is destined to follow: Hazel's history becomes the dreary repetition of error. This outcome is unspeakably bitter for Webb who aligns herself with Hardy's strident social concern, which desired the 'break up' of 'the present pernicious conventions in respect of women, customs, religion'.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Hardy's letter to the Fawcett Society dated 30 November 1906. Quoted in Rosemary Sumner, *Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 190.

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That a woman should, in the evolution of life, cease to be a virgin and become a mother is a thing so natural and so purely physical as hardly to need comment; but that the immortal part of her should be robbed, that she should cease to be part of an entity in a world where personality is the only rare and precious thing – this is tragic. (*GE*, p. 256)

The deep affinity Tess Durbeyfield possesses for her organic surroundings, which is tainted by Alec d'Urberville's rape/seduction and Clare's trivialising diletantism at Talbothays, mirrors Hazel's responsiveness to 'the soft voices of the trees' (*GE*, p. 205) – fatally ruptured after her abduction by Reddin, who in 'the thick darkness of the lonely fields [...] might have been some hero of the dead, mouthing a satanic recitative amid a chorus of lost souls' (*GE*, p. 142). As Edward Marston is preaching the Sunday evening sermon on the potency of prayer to safeguard the beloved from all mischief, Reddin catches Hazel as she runs from him, throws her to the ground and rapes her. Reddin 'in the fields and woods enjoyed himself only. For he took his own atmosphere with him wherever he went, and before his footsteps weakness fled and beauty folded' (*GE*, p. 164). Hazel has no energy to resist, since she believes magical forces rather than instinctual response determine her actions.

After he has raped Hazel, Reddin's eyes fill with tears – not of remorse so much as of grief. This momentary feeling translates into a desire to convert Hazel through matrimony into a listless automaton, an acquiescent child-rearing tool that will furnish future heirs at his estate, Undern Hall. Edward Marston's demand is essentially the same as Reddin's: Hazel's worth will be determined by her production of a paternal facsimile. This is the grimmest implication of the link between the female body and the motherland imbuing the Persephone myth in Webb's fictional scheme: repeatedly associated with vegetable and animal imagery, Hazel will be compelled to resemble the epitome of relentless reproduction which Susan mentions in Woolf's *The Years*: 'I shall lie like a field bearing crops in rotation [...] more will come, more children; more cradles'.⁷⁷ Susan's momentary recognition of her life's severe circumscription – 'I am fenced in, planted here like one of my own trees'⁷⁸ – is especially resonant given Hazel's fate.

Reddin, for whom paternity and venery go hand-in-hand, starts to contemplate the human 'crops' he shall garner through his newly acquired maternal machine: '[t]wo possessions are better than one, and he could well afford children'. Gratified by the concept, Reddin sees himself as noble for honouring Hazel as the current embodiment of his idea that mothers and territory are guarantors of racial stability; he is even apprehensive of this sudden 'generous' consideration. The intensified function of the female form

⁷⁷ Woolf, *The Years*, pp. 131, 173.

⁷⁸ Woolf, *The Years*, p. 190.

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reiterated throughout *Gone to Earth* – linked to sex, childbirth and mortality – engages with the pervasive public discourses of the interwar years which debated whether women's physiognomy made them unfit for anything beyond domestic tasks. But it is crucial that Webb portrays both Hazel and Reddin 'trapped by something vast and intangible' (*GE*, p. 193); they cower as if 'beneath a hand raised to strike' (*GE*, p. 193):

Two larches bent by the gales kept up a groaning as bole wore on bole, wounding each other every time they swayed. In the indifferent hauteur of the dark steepes, the secret arcades, the avenues leading nowhere, crouched these two incarnations of the troubled earth, sentient for a moment, capable of sadness, cruelty, terror and revolt, and then lapsed again into the earth. (*GE*, p. 193)⁷⁹

Webb's ominous account of the detrimental operation of natural forces within the forest evokes *The Woodlanders* in which Grace Melbury notices the extreme and unrelenting cruelty that the Hintocks imposes upon itself when enmeshed in a Darwinian struggle for survival: 'trees close together' are 'wrestling for existence, their branches disfigured with wounds resulting from their mutual rubbings' (*Woodlanders*, p. 234). That Webb utilizes imagery of natural destruction to frame Hazel and Reddin's sexual encounter registers the relationship between malformation and ruthless exploitation. Reddin installs Hazel at Udern Hall, but she broods over his assumption that she will remain there for good as his 'Queen'. She has now learned the most blatant facts of sexuality, but she does not yet associate them with pregnancy and maternity.

Udern Hall [...] was a place of which the influence and magic were not good. Even in May, when the lilacs frothed into purple, paved the lawn with shadows, steeped the air with scent; when soft leaves lipped each other consolingly; when blackbirds sang, fell in their effortless way from the green height to the green depth, and sang again – still, something that haunted the place set the heart fluttering. No place is its own, and that which is most stained with old tumults has the strongest fascination. (*GE*, p. 28)

Udern Hall is Webb's version of the Frazerian underworld, a 'gloomy subterranean realm' (*GB*, p. 406), to which Hazel is consigned: 'now she lived at Udern, she never went out in the green dawn or came home

⁷⁹ Webb's focus on the 'indifferent hauteur of the dark steepes' presages Mary Butts's depiction of 'the earth' in her pamphlet *Traps for Unbelievers* which 'has its eye open night and day, an infinite number of eyes. Utterly observant, utterly indifferent eyes': 'There is one thing that is true about the earth, not often noticed or obviously true, how quickly, in the friendliest country, the most loved, described, harvested or defiled, the land will become again a no-man's land. A stone's throw from the ploughed field, the orchard, the vicarage garden there will be the strangeness of the unharvested, and patches of wilderness dividing field from field' (*TFU*, p. 281).

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wreathed in pansy and wild snapdragon' (*GE*, p. 255). 'It was almost as if the freemasonry of the green world was up in arms for Hazel. She had its blood in her veins, and shared with it the silent worship of freedom [...], and had now been plunged so deeply into human life that she was lost to it' (*GE*, p. 204). The emptily hedonistic Reddin, however, is no throwback to the complex Druidical rites analysed in *The Golden Bough*. Like Alec d'Urberville, he displays unfettered pagan sensualism without a modicum of pagan belief.⁸⁰

Undern Hall indicates both the debased temperament of its owner and the 'dead world' (*GE*, p. 25) over which he presides. When all around Undern is a may-time flowering of organic plenitude, the building epitomises stultifying stagnation; it is moribund matter, necrotic, a festering architectural 'body' whose 'influence and magic were not good'. Like many of the ancestral homes in Webb's fiction, Undern's walls are crusted with the baleful 'residue' of those who have occupied and abused the site. Undern 'seemed as if all the people that had ever lived there had come back, ignoring in their mournful dignity of eternal death these momentary wraiths of life' (*GE*, p. 251). The dead hand of the provincial past lays a poisonous weight on purposeful change, and Undern becomes a mausoleum of Gothic melodrama – a mottled repository 'full of subdued complaints and whisperings' (*GE*, p. 204). The estate is both womb and tomb, but Webb signals how Undern can never be completely redeemed through dignified intervention in the modern moment.

VI

Webb's delineation of Undern Hall elaborates the more threatening side of what Hardy terms in *The Woodlanders* 'old association' attaching to 'a solitary house in the country':

an almost exhaustive biographical or historical acquaintance with every object, animate or inanimate, within the observer's horizon [...] what bygone domestic dramas of love, jealousy, revenge, or disappointment, have been enacted in the [...] mansion.
(*Woodlanders*, p. 94)

Undern's windows at dawn and sunset have a 'sanguinary aspect, staring into the delicate sky dramas like blind, bloodless eyes' (*GE*, p. 28). Undern Pool is 'full of leaf shadows like multitudinous lolling tongues, and the smell of

⁸⁰ See Ellen Rooney, "'A Little More Than Persuading': Tess and the subject of sexual violence", in *Rape and Representation*, ed. by Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 87-114.

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mud tainted the air – half sickly, half sweet' (*GE*, p. 29). In the garden, cherries fall from the trees 'with the same rich monotony, the same fatality as drops of blood' to lie under the 'fungus-riven trees' (*GE*, p. 29). These trees spoiled by ugly decay and parasitic growth mirror the descriptions of stunted and mutilated tree-life in the wilder recesses of Mrs Charmond's park in *The Woodlanders*: 'slimy streams of fresh moisture, exuding from decayed holes caused by old amputations, ran down the bark of the oaks and elms' (*Woodlanders*, p. 149); the half-dead oak 'hollow, and disfigured with white tumours, its roots spreading out like claws grasping the ground' (*Woodlanders*, p. 161). In an echo of Swinburne's Proserpine lyrics, whose goddess is linked with mortality and sleep, the heavy, oppressive somnolence of Undern shows how 'the very principle of life seemed to slumber'.

Undern Hall functions as a grotesque re-imagining of Alec d'Urberville's country estate 'The Slopes', with its incongruous amalgam of modern sterility and primitive fecundity. The ironic contrast between the bright red newness of 'The Slopes' and the eerie prehistoric wilderness of The Chase is underlined by the 'Druidical mistletoe [...] still found on aged oaks'.

[The house...] was of recent erection – indeed almost new – and of the same rich red colour that formed such a contrast with the evergreens of the lodge. Far behind the corner of the house – which rose like a geranium bloom against the subdued colours around – stretched the soft azure landscape of The Chase – a truly venerable tract of forest land; one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primaeval date, wherein Druidical mistletoe was still found on aged oaks, and where enormous yew-trees, not planted by the hand of man, grew as they had grown when they were pollarded for bows. All this sylvan antiquity however, though visible from The Slopes, was outside the immediate boundaries of the estate. (*Tess*, p. 41)

Just as Reddin carries the 'merely passive' Hazel (*GE*, p. 205) off to his residence in a cart that careers from side to side, so does Alec d'Urberville transport a frightened Tess to his residence ('Down, down they sped, the wheels humming like a top'). Both Webb and Hardy employ these 'abduction' scenes to parody the seizing of the unwilling Persephone by Hades, bearing her away in his chariot to the infernal regions. But instead of the netherworld god's 'golden car' (*GB*, p. 406), Alec ironically possesses a 'dog-cart' (*Tess*, p. 57). As he drives the heroine downhill, the ground seems to open up like the chasm out of which Hades suddenly arose: '[t]he aspect of the straight road enlarged with their advance, the two banks dividing like a splitting stick' (*Tess*, p. 57).

Like Pluto, whose name the Romans often translated into *Dis*, the Latin term for riches, Jack Reddin has sufficient funds to obtain the commodity of Hazel's body: "I never mind paying for my pleasures'" (*GE*, p. 273). As Jane Harrison explained in her 1883 essay on 'Demeter':

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Aides emerges from the nether empire at a bound, glorious in his royal sceptre and bearing a horn of plenty, symbol of the hidden riches in the underworld – those riches from which he took his other name of [...] the Wealthy One.⁸¹

Even Reddin's gifts comprise an act of taking Hazel into custody, with bracelets resembling manacles: '[h]e caught [Hazel's] wrists and fastened one bracelet on each. She struggled, but could not get free or undo the clasps' (GE, p. 191). Reddin's romantic attentions underscore this crippling confinement in a world of grim spatial divisions and territorial borders: 'Reddin suddenly gripped the long coils that were loose on her shoulders, twisted them in a rope round his neck, and kissed her. She was enmeshed'.⁸²

Reddin, for whom women are 'what a watch is to a child – something to be smashed, not studied' (GE, p. 277), is a bizarre caricature of the 'Dark Master' D. H. Lawrence imagines as enabling the Persephone figure Alvina Houghton to complete herself in *The Lost Girl*. Michèle Barale contends that Lawrence's 'belief in a higher mystery, to be best known and shared through sexual passion; his belief in sexuality's power to enable human entrance into the larger universe, echo Webb's own convictions'.⁸³ But if both authors perceive male sexual energy as mysticism's agent, furnishing the intensity necessary to elude the shadow cast by unfeeling social institutions, then this formula clearly does not function in *Gone to Earth*. In *The Lost Girl* Lawrence places immense stress upon romantic love's capacity to weather the reductive forms and agents of orthodox morality. Webb evinces that the institutions where love has primary value – marriage and the family – are grotesquely gendered and implacably opposed to female self-determination. The very goal of romantic love cannot be attained because the framework in which it is enacted depends upon male dominance and female acquiescence.

Hazel cannot strive to become herself; she must become someone else's – from independent self to adjunct, plaything, and trophy. The rape of Hazel Woodus and Rwth's enslavement, torture and murder in *Seven for a Secret* (1922) are the darker depictions of the same romantic ideology that has Amber of *The House in Dormer Forest* (1920) willingly submit to her husband's demands that she sacrifice for him many of her own driving ambitions. Contrary to critical consensus, Webb's survey of the crumbling abodes of Shropshire history is not fuelled by vacuous and cloying sentimentality for 'traditional values' in an age of escalating technological advance. She is cannily oblique when assessing the legitimacy of widely

⁸¹ Harrison, 'Greek Myths in Greek Art III: Demeter', p. 146.

⁸² Adrian Forty discusses women's identification with (prison)-houses in early-twentieth century British culture in *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750* (London: Thames, 1992), pp. 104-107.

⁸³ Barale, *Daughters and Lovers*, p. 2.

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accepted folk-traditions, and reveals many vestiges of ancient lore, such as the witchcraft in *Precious Bane*, to be idiotic, gruesome, or even destructive.

In these novels Webb is quick to expose the calcified remnants of a community's former verve as a highly integrated social structure. Human desire is hemmed in by a myriad of constraints upon the process of female growth – constraints as overt as codes for female dress and behaviour and as covert as value-laden concepts of chastity and wifehood. Webb's fictions accurately portray the daughter's lessons in romance as taken from a text filled with ellipses; nowhere within that education will she learn to name herself or uncover the true nature of her desires. In *Gone to Earth* the pleasures of sexuality and maternity barely impinge upon the institutions of marriage and motherhood, just as the profound joys of spirituality never cross the threshold of conventional, organised religion. Partial fulfilment, as Lawrence's *The Lost Girl* demonstrates, will only be enjoyed at the cultural margins. But in *Gone to Earth* there is no safe margin for Hazel to inhabit once she is trapped in the unforgiving grip of lower-middle class 'respectability'.

VII

Webb's caustic re-imagining of Persephone exposes the devastating effect of a censorious and unbending bourgeois morality on the physical and spiritual life of those who plan to subsist beyond its confines. Notions of sexuality as bestial and gross foster marriages in which spiritual intimacy never matures to its fullest expression, and in relationships where the merely carnal cannot be transfigured since there is no means of resuscitating the pre-Christian earth-goddess. The core motifs of social 'restraint' (*GE*, p. 77) and compromise infect even the ostensibly sedate hinterland of 'fields and farms' (*GE*, p. 77), as when Hazel witnesses the harvest-time ritual killing of small animals:

A scene came back to her from the week before – it seemed years ago. They had gone into the harvest-field after a hot, yellow day haunted by the sound of cutting. Only a small square of orange wheat was left; the rest of the field lay in the pale disorder of destruction [...] Hazel knew what drama was to be enacted; knew what the knobbed sticks were for; knew who crouched in the tall, kindly wheat, palpitant, unaware that escape was impossible. [...]

Hazel knew that the small square must be packed with rabbits, stark-eyed and still as death, who had, with a fated foolishness, drawn in from the outer portions of the field all day as the reaper went round (*GE*, p. 252)

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Again Webb deliberately composes a scene replete with echoes of, and pointed references to Hardy, especially the account of the Marlott harvesting in Chapter 14 of *Tess*.

Rabbits, hares, snakes, rats, mice, retreated inwards as into a fastness, unaware of the ephemeral nature of their refuge, and of the doom that awaited them later in the day when, their covert shrinking to a more and more horrible narrowness, they were huddled together friends and foes, till the last few yards of upright wheat fell also under the teeth of the unerring reaper, and they were every one put to death by the sticks and stones of the harvesters. (*Tess*, p. 93)

Webb's version of this harvest ritual ('Hazel knew that the small square must be packed with rabbits') manifests the extent to which the language of sacrificial suffering colours nature's cycle of birth, growth, and reproduction.⁸⁴ As such the novel's anguished perspective of 'a world where nothing is secure' (*GE*, p. 76) is oddly contradictory, able to mollify early champions of Webb's art like John Buchan, Arnold Bennett, and Rebecca West, but never promoting a worldview that tenders the least comfort to a traumatised, war-ravaged generation. Webb does not embrace the dominant mobilising myth imbuing interwar British culture of a rustic landscape's 'healing salve',⁸⁵ enjoyed by Dorothy Richardson's Miriam in a traditional Sussex community insulated from rapid change and where oxen were still used for ploughing until 1926.⁸⁶ *Gone to Earth* actually smothers 'the frail hope of the possibility of joy' (*GE*, p. 270) implicit in Persephone's ecstatic reunion with her mother Demeter in the sunlit springtime of the myth. Not long before her own death Hazel sees a damaged tomb, 'but not as a grave from which one has risen from the dead. A headstone lay in the path, and the text, "In sure and certain hope of the resurrection", was half obliterated' (*GE*, p. 259).

Writing a review of Edith Wharton's *Twilight Sleep* for the September 1927 *Bookman*, Webb explained why the novel failed for her: 'there is no inevitability, there is nothing of the sense of helpless humanity struggling in a net set for it before time was'.⁸⁷ *Gone to Earth* supplies this sense of

⁸⁴ Webb's portrayal bears a striking resemblance to an account of a Kentish practice from James Frazer's 'Notes on Harvest Customs' for the 1889 *Folk-Lore Journal*: 'as the reaping machine goes round and round the corn-field, the wild animals (hares, rabbits, &c.) retreat into the standing corn in the middle of the field, and when the last patch is to be cut down the reapers stand round it with sticks, ready to knock down and kill the animals when they dart out of the corn' (p. 50).

⁸⁵ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, IV, p. 414.

⁸⁶ Michael Reed, *The Landscape of Britain from the Beginnings to 1914* (Savage: Barnes and Noble, 1990), p. 281.

⁸⁷ Webb, 'Irony and Mrs. Wharton', *The Bookman* (1927), p. 303. Reprinted in *Collected Prose and Poems*, ed. by Coles, pp. 69-70.

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inevitability by uncovering atavistic passions that lurk beneath the crust of civilised decorum, unleashing the worst evil of cruelty. R. R. Marett observed in 1917, the year when *Gone to Earth* was first published, that 'savage impulses' always remain 'dormant in the heart of civilised man', ready to 'spring to life again',⁸⁸ thus perpetuating the age-old ritualistic elimination of the guileless and the vulnerable: 'the whole world is the tomb of beauty, and has been made by man the torture-chamber of weakness' (*GE*, p. 136). Webb reassesses this notion by showing, with remorseless logic, her nature-goddess defeated from the very outset, given that Hazel has 'a look as of those predestined to grief, almost an air of martyrdom' (*GE*, p. 14).

Unlike the better educated Tess who spurns Joan Durbeyfield's *Compleat Fortune-Teller*, and her 'fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folklore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads' (*Tess*, p. 27), Hazel inherits from her mother Maray a cherished 'treasure' – 'an old, dirty, partially illegible manuscript-book of spells and charms and other gipsy lore' (*GE*, p. 12). Hazel unhesitatingly accepts natural magic, and regional legends exert such a hold over her imagination that she feels her own fate inextricably intertwined with them: especially the legend of the Black Huntsman and his pack, recalling the 'close underground cavern' (*GE*, p. 283) from which Pluto emerges to abduct Persephone. The Huntsman is of archetypal significance in *Gone to Earth* and becomes a manifestation of Wotan, god of war, storm, and frenzy. The dark myth is so deeply engraved on Hazel's subconscious that it needs very little external pressure to become activated and completely possess her waking thoughts.⁸⁹ Though Marston resolves 'to combat these superstitions and replace them by a saner religion', he cannot fathom, let alone stifle, 'the ancient, cruel and mighty power of these exhalations of the soil' (*GE*, p. 71).

The myths of the Huntsman and the pack presage the novel's finale: 'the dark and winding path that she [Hazel] must tread from that night onward to its hidden, shadowy ending' (*GE*, pp. 23-24). Myth comes alive in the ritual of the hunt: in frenzied pursuit of the fox, Reddin's pack also targets Hazel. As Reddin tries to retrieve Hazel by lifting her onto his horse, she connects him only with the bloodthirsty bravado of the Black Huntsman and turning away in terror falls over the 'grey steeps' of the quarry. The primitive motif

⁸⁸ R. R. Marett, 'The Psychology of Culture Contact, Presidential Address to the Folklore Society', *Folklore*, 28 (1917), 14.

⁸⁹ Webb's 'Black Huntsman' folk-motif is common to many European countries in varying forms: hence the ghostly huntsman in the folklore of southwest Shropshire, with tales of Wild Edric's implacable presence, his black hounds baying at night, and phantom dogs. The Shropshire legend has it that Wild Edric is seen riding across the Stiperstones with his hounds before a national disaster – in 1914 there were reports from Shropshire country-folk of his appearance just prior to the outbreak of the Great War.

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of foxhunting and blood-sacrifice ('[Hazel] saw the knife descend – saw [the fox] cut in two and flung [...] to the pack, and torn to fragments') is as central to Webb's novel as it is to D. H. Lawrence's story 'The Fox' (1922). Webb can only have Hazel killed by the hunting pack – nature's creatures perverted by human training to run down the fox, a member of the dog's own family.

Hazel's enfeeblement and absorption back into the forest is not the true source of tragedy here, for in the full natural cycle growth and decay, sowing and reaping, are equally necessary:

[w]e know, too, the echoes of things outside our ken – the thought that shapes itself in the bee's brain and becomes a waxen box of sweets [...] the upward push of folded grass, and how the leaf feels in all its veins the cold rain; the ceremonial that passes yearly in the emerald temples of bud and calyx – we have walked those temples; we are the sacrifice on those altars. (*GE*, p. 254)

Webb's acute sense of disaster stems from the fact that Hazel, a 'wood nymph',⁹⁰ in John Buchan's words, has not been *fertile* in her time and fails to complete her regenerative function by giving birth to her child. Thus she personifies the thwarted destiny of a countryside, an underclass, and a gender. Webb's Persephone figure, hearing 'the shrieking of the damned' (*GE*, p. 286) and heavy with the pregnancy that prevents her eluding the chasing pack of hunting hounds, is consigned to her fate: '[t]hen, as the pack, with a ferocity of triumph, was flinging itself upon her, she was gone' (*GE*, p. 287).

Webb explicitly structures the finale to connote that Hazel's disappearance and death may be the violently purgative moment which precedes renewal and visionary consolation, just as primitive Greek ritual is often inaugurated by grisly acts before resulting in the promise of life eternal. 'Life is a taciturn mother', according to Webb's narrator, 'and teaches not so much by instruction as by blows' (*GE*, p. 206). Jane Harrison focuses on the 'intense vitalism' of violent primitive ritual: 'we have at last got one tangible, substantial factor in religion, a real, live experience'.⁹¹ But the savage violence inflicted by the ultimate creatrix in Webb's narrative scheme, far from being a valid religious 'experience', leads nowhere: it is random, pointless, indiscriminate, and without any fructifying outcome. Webb is repelled by the seemingly anarchic process of Nature's 'blind-law', with 'death the constant penalty for a species' lack of successful adaptation'.⁹²

⁹⁰ Buchan, 'Introduction', *Gone to Earth*, p. ii.

⁹¹ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 169.

⁹² Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 167.

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However, Webb’s disgust is tempered by a hint of bitterly grotesque humour: Hazel is pursued to the quarry-edge by a pack of hunting-dogs, subverting the Actaeon myth in which the hunter, espying Diana bathing naked, was chased down by his own hounds. In Webb’s closing episode nature is drawn as a feckless ‘mother’ whose callous movements are defined by ‘imponderable’ caprice (*GE*, p. 11); she provides only meagre dispensations to daughters who lapse from high-minded maternal duty; and rarefied society does not modulate its expectations for daughters who disavow its pious platitudes.

The frequently conventional conclusions to Webb’s novels are problematised by her inclusion of the traumas of women’s half-known lives and the fragility of female fulfilment: abortions, domestic brutality, rape, even murder. In *Gone to Earth* Hazel’s sole desire is to live in the woods, unencumbered by civilised manners. But nature, in Webb’s austere framework, demands unremitting growth not stasis, and for women such growth involves sexuality, and ultimately children. Hazel can either marry or she can die; she is no freer to evade that dichotomised destiny than she is to escape her rapist or deny her subsequent pregnancy. Hazel is ‘predestined to suffer’ according to John Buchan, ‘since she can never adjust herself to the strait orbit of human life’.⁹³

VIII

To James Frazer, the Persephone myth is unusual in its concentration on death’s bleak mystery. However, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* permits room for a reading that sees Persephone’s ascent from Hades in more cheerful terms:

The cyclicity of the resolution, in which Persephone is to her mother alternately alive and dead, distant and symbiotic, offers an alternative to oedipal narratives structured according to principles of linear repetition. The ‘Hymn to Demeter’ thus both inscribes the story of mother and daughter within patriarchal reality and allows it to mark a feminine difference. Hades occasions both the separation and a narrative which will repair the breach.⁹⁴

⁹³ Buchan, ‘Introduction’, *Gone to Earth*, p. i.

⁹⁴ M. Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1989), pp. 5-6. Hirsch contends that if the separation between mother and daughter brutally inflicted by Hades and Zeus is unnecessarily harsh, the daughter’s sexual maturity and a less radical estrangement from her mother is both necessary and empowering. Hades, if inadvertently, affords Demeter and Persephone a narrative and a participation in a larger world.

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Lawrence's *The Lost Girl* amplifies this 'narrative', attesting to Jane Harrison's conviction that Greek myth 'adapts itself to the consciousness of successive ages, which has within it no seed of possible death – a certain largeness and universality which outlives the individual race and persists for all time'.⁹⁵

Gone to Earth furnishes a tormented perception of a matricidal society ruthlessly regulated by the duplicitous and sexually prudish guardians of 'civilised' culture. Webb conveys what Lily Ramsay intuitively in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1926), that she inhabits a society where the mother's wisdom is submerged and suppressed: 'she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman' were 'tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public'.⁹⁶ Revitalised female archetypes and the female principle they represent have a special significance for Lily, as they do for Stephen in Joyce's *Ulysses* and Harry in Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, young artists who experience a renewed relationship with the female archetypes who dominate these works, before they are fully able to create. Webb's protagonist has no such opportunity for 'rebirth' through a deepened symbolic or ritualistic apprehension of the earth-goddess, since *Gone to Earth* portrays Hazel increasingly, in the words of Elizabeth Bowen, as 'webbed down, frustrated [...] like someone cast, still alive, as an effigy for their own tomb'.⁹⁷

Rose Macaulay's *Non-Combatants and Others*, published the year before Webb's novel in 1916, has the journalist Nicholas Sandomir speculate about the possibility of salvaging '[c]onstructive force' or a sympathetic sensitivity, from the repressive rubble of post-war Britain:

Constructive force will be the one thing needed when the war is over; any one with a programme, and the brain and will to carry it out; but where's it to come from? Those who aren't killed or cut to bits will be too adrift and demoralised and dazed to do anything intelligent. We're fast losing even such mental coherence and concentration as we had.⁹⁸

Webb's treatment of a vanquished fertility figure within the dense Shropshire woods is 'demoralised', 'dazed', and rooted in hopeless introspection. In H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, the brave quester is repeatedly worried that she is 'only a daughter' like Persephone, mired in a netherworld of non-being, or like Iphigenia, separated from her mother with the promise of a marriage that

⁹⁵ Harrison, *Introductory Studies in Greek Art* (London: Unwin, 1885), p. vi.

⁹⁶ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Oxford: The World's Classics, 1989), p. 50.

⁹⁷ Bowen, *The House in Paris* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 47-48.

⁹⁸ Rose Macaulay, *Non-Combatants and Others* (1st pub. 1916; London: Methuen, 1986), p. 47.

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turns into a death.⁹⁹ In the next chapter, E. M. Forster attempts to neutralize the autistic isolation that Webb expresses, by reinventing Demeter as the presiding deity of a beleaguered rustic England. However, *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End* each register brisk suburbanisation and demographic shift as conspiring to overturn the expansive prospects and pastoral possibilities synonymous with the earth-goddess.

Howards End in particular is obsessed by a question that Hardy and Webb can answer in only the most dourly dispirited terms: how can mothers and daughters safely house themselves within, let alone inherit and rule over, the gardens and greenwoods of England?¹⁰⁰ Helen Schlegel points at the inexorable ‘creep’ of metropolitan modernity discernible over the meadows, the unwholesome ‘red rust’ that signals the colonisation of everyday life by strange class configurations. Forster noted with increasingly exhausted alarm in his *Commonplace Book*, ‘[c]ountryside seems down and out between civilisation and its own late storms. The defences seem pierced at last’.¹⁰¹

‘Woman’, Edith Lees Ellis remarked in 1921, ‘wants to build [a home] under which she can walk upright’.¹⁰² To explore this notion of how to reconceive the woman’s home as a locus of national esteem, sharpening her own propensity for uniquely female forms of creation, Forster’s fiction adumbrates an ancient maternal inheritance so deeply buried that it lingers in the minds of his characters only as a faint, fragile, and far-off memory; if it surfaces occasionally it becomes as difficult to decipher as the old crone’s semiotic babble in Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*. Forster infers, as Woolf did in 1937, that he was living in a ‘moment of transition on the bridge’ connecting ‘the private house with the world of public life’.¹⁰³ The private home becomes key to his comprehension of a meaningful relationship between matriarchal potencies that show ‘the dead / are no more dead, / the grain is gold’,¹⁰⁴ and national culture.

⁹⁹ H.D., *Helen in Egypt*, pp. 148, 151.

¹⁰⁰ See Stuart Christie, *Worlding Forster: The Passage from Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 11-44.

¹⁰¹ E. M. Forster, *Commonplace Book*, ed. by Philip Gardner (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 56.

¹⁰² Edith Lees Ellis, *The New Horizon in Love and Life* (London: Black, 1921), p. 128.

¹⁰³ Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt, 1966), p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ H.D., ‘The Mysteries’, in *Red Roses for Bronze* (Boston: Houghton, 1931), pp. 139-48.

Chapter 5

E. M. Forster and Demeter's English Garden

I

In the British Museum, in passing from the Archaic Greek Sculpture Room to the room of the Mausoleum Marbles, the visitor enters a small antechamber. Here, on the right, he sees the statue of a seated woman whose beauty can scarcely pass unnoticed by the most careless. There is a softness, there is a pathos in the face, a look of tempered sadness about the mouth and eyes that make us say instinctively, [...] "That face has had a history." The woman has passed the first bloom of youth, it would be sad indeed if such pathos were imprinted on the features of a young girl. Her figure, too, is full and matronly; she wears the veil that has been her bridal attire; ample drapery is cast about her in beautiful, simple, almost careless folds; her hair is long and abundant. She is very calm for all her sorrow, and very gracious.¹

Jane Harrison's 1884 article 'Greek Myths in Greek Art III' registers the rapt fascination of gazing at the statue of 'Knidian' Demeter, which also elicited Walter Pater's direct and full aesthetic appreciation in *Greek Studies* (pp. 150-52).² Pater deplored the grievous misunderstanding of such artefacts as

elements in a sequence of abstract ideas, as embodiments, in a sort of petrified language, of pure thoughts [...] than as elements of a sequence in the material order, as results of a designed and skilful dealing of accomplished fingers with precious forms of matter for the delight of the eyes. (GS, p. 189)

Harrison, like Pater before her, positions material culture in palpable and religious conditions that complicates the tranquil surface of the Greek world garnered, fabricated, and enshrined in the sculpture galleries. Thus she alerts

¹ Harrison, 'Greek Myths in Greek Art III: Demeter', pp. 145-46.

² The Elgin Marbles had been opened to the British public's view in 1816. Pater contended that the associations of insuperable classical grandeur and chilly isolation, set apart within the 'grey walls' of 'the British Museum' (GS, p. 188), falsified the rhythms of Greek life as well as Greek sculpture. For Pater the initial premise of '[t]he beginnings of Greek sculpture' is that we cannot inspect these works as they were seen by the Greeks themselves until, by an act of historical imagination, we remove them from their modern museum setting. He supposed that it was evidence of a volcanic chasm at Cnidus that prompted the construction there of a shrine to Demeter and Persephone. (GS, pp. 141, 55-56, 59) See also H.D.'s 'Demeter', *Hymen* (London: The Egoist Press, 1921), p. 17, where H.D. presents an interior monologue of the Cnidian Demeter housed in the British Museum.

‘the visitor’ to the unsuspected fund of anthropological data hidden within what amounted to a jumbled bone-yard in the British Museum (the ‘Knidian’ artefacts uncovered by Charles Newton and shipped from southwest Turkey were stored for lack of available space in ‘temporary’ sheds under the museum colonnade until 1880). Harrison’s plangent account of the statue of seated Demeter from Cnidus signifies the ‘sensuous and material’ power of this figure, thus paying quiet tribute to Pater’s definition of the deity in the plastic phase, who is at once an icon of seasonal fluctuation, a graceful woman and mother, and a complex trope in a domestic narrative, intimating cultural continuity between modern Western Europe and ancient Greece, a figure ‘close to earth and human flesh and alive with passion and local colour’.³

In 1903 E. M. Forster embarked on an archaeological cruise to Greece guided by E. A. Gardner, a journey that left him tired and listless until the group came to Cnidus.⁴ The next year Forster published an essay in the *Independent Review*, named after the city (March 1904):

Somewhere or other there must have been the temple of Apollo, and the temple of Poseidon, and the shrine of the nymphs, in whose honour all the men of the Dorian Hexapolis came yearly to race; and somewhere else there must have been the ruined house of the Cnidian Aphrodite. But I did see the home of the Goddess who has made Cnidus famous for us, for, up on the right, the mountain had been scarped and a platform levelled, and someone pointed it out and said: ‘That is the precinct of the Infernal Deities, where they got the Demeter’ – that Demeter of Cnidus, whom we hold in the British Museum now. She was there at that moment, warm and comfortable in that little recess of hers between the Ephesian Room and the Archaic Room, with the electric light fizzing above her, and casting blue shadows over her chin. She is dusted twice a week, and there is a railing in front, with ‘No Admittance’, so that she cannot be touched. And if human industry can find that lost arm of hers, and that broken nose, and human ingenuity can put them on, she shall be made as good as new.⁵

³ Evangelista, “‘Outward Nature and the Moods of Men’”, p. 107.

⁴ Cnidus commanded a key position amid the sea-lanes around the coast of Caria, and the nearby islands of Cos, Nisyros, Tilos, Syme, and more distant Rhodes. Cnidus is just a day’s sail away from Mausolus’s capital at Halicarnassus. In its heyday Cnidus boasted four stone-built theatres, a number of fine temples, substantial private houses, a vast necropolis, massive fortifications, and two harbours, one military, with a great chain suspended across its entrance, and the other commercial. In antiquity Cnidus was best known for its nude statue of Aphrodite by the celebrated Athenian sculptor Praxiteles. British travellers and archaeologists have a long history of involvement in the antiquities of the Cnidian peninsula. Sir William Gell and his companions pioneered modern understanding of the site when they went there under the auspices of the Dilettanti Society in the summer of 1812. Their published account was the principal inspiration for Charles Newton’s decision to excavate there in 1857-59.

⁵ Forster, ‘Cnidus’, in *Abinger Harvest* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 171.

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It was at Cnidus, Forster felt, that Greece first seized his imagination, possibly because this statue of Demeter was, as P. N. Furbank notes, 'already a private cult with him',⁶ evoking a goddess synonymous with ideas of unstinting plenitude and completion; a potency whose obedience to all of nature's appetites exposes the grudging, narrow-minded pieties and cloying conventionality of the suburban mores castigated in his early fictions. This is borne out by Forster's novel *The Longest Journey*: a likeness of the statue swings from the ceiling of Stephen Wonham's spartan Cadover bedroom: '[i]t was a strange ghostly place, and Rickie [Elliot] was quite startled when a picture swung towards him, and he saw the Demeter of Cnidus, shimmering and grey'.⁷ This image of Demeter is materialised in the half-brothers' real mother, Agnes Pembroke, from whom their incipient fellowship literally springs. To Rickie's friend Stewart Ansell, the 'statue of the Cnidian Demeter' is among those 'monuments of our more reticent beliefs', typifying 'powers he could not cope with, nor, as yet, understand' (*LJ*, p. 186).⁸

Here, as elsewhere in Forster's writing, Demeter signals an ineffable visionary perception, 'something beyond the field of action and behaviour',⁹ which confirms a 'vague suspicion that the human relation comes second to something else'.¹⁰ Forster's sustained attempt to become conversant with this 'something else' seeks that condition where, according to Arthur Symons, 'the visible world is no longer a reality [...] the unseen world no longer a dream'.¹¹ *Howards End* makes repeated references to the 'unseen' and its synonyms (the inner life, infinity), a private, cultish, and abstract language resistant to exact definition yet demanding individualised, creative responses from those attuned to its elliptical promptings.

Forster's slippery tone in his 'Cnidus' article raises questions about whether his fiction affords 'Admittance' to this more profound, multilayered awareness of the earth-goddess, a 'vision belonging to another cosmogony',¹² transcending facile and flippant touristic survey. Forster must have known

⁶ Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 103.

⁷ Forster, *The Longest Journey* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 146. Hereafter referred to as *LJ*.

⁸ Chapter 20 of *The Longest Journey* begins thus: 'Ansell was in his favourite haunt – the Reading Room of the British Museum. In that book-encircled space he always could find peace. He loved to see the volumes rising tier above tier into the misty dome. He loved the chairs that glide so noiselessly, and the radiating desks, and the central area, where the catalogue shelves curve, round the superintendent's throne. There he knew that his life was not ignoble' (*LJ*, p. 180).

⁹ *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. by Mary Lago and Furbank, 2 vols (London: Collins, 1983), I, pp. 187–88.

¹⁰ *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. by Lago and Furbank, I, p. 209.

¹¹ Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1899), p. 6.

¹² *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. by Lago and Furbank, I, p. 285.

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how the very same issues also dominate Walter Pater's enthralled scrutiny of the Cnidian heirlooms in 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone', which melds iconography, mythology, and archaeology to engage relics at the intersection of their religious, artistic and practical purposes. Throughout Pater's *Greek Studies*, objects drawn from the earth like the Cnidian Demeter, Venus de Melos or the Aeginetan Marbles (GS, p. 190) engender a sudden revelation, or a flickering sense of deep collective unconsciousness. By studying the tangibility of archaeological vestiges unearthed by Charles Newton at Cnidus, Pater felt equipped to bridge the suffocating silences between the seen and the unseen, between mute artefact and potentially rich symbolic resonance. The 'extant remains, as they were found upon the spot, permit us to enter' (GS, p. 272) – and it is Pater who plays the indefatigable cicerone, guiding the reader through the tombs, extracting from the dual fertility goddess 'a quickening and sustaining atmosphere of great value'.¹³ Pater's first biographer A. C. Benson recognised the beguiling paradox in his subject's aesthetic historicism:

in the perceptions of these old imaginings we may not only draw nearer to the heart of the ancient world, but that they may bring us too, by sweet association and delicate shadowy imagery, some uplifting and enlarging of our own sympathies and hopes.¹⁴

The initial phase of Forster's 'Cnidus' article does not signal the same Paterian devotional zest that disinterred cultural forms might be precious agents from deep archaeological time, returning to 'uplift' and edify contemporary culture. Pater's archaeological aesthetic invites the modern observer to peer beneath the British Museum's iconography in order to achieve empathy with a distant ancestry. However, the very fragmentation of the recovered remnants (Demeter's 'broken nose' and 'lost arm') manifests the impossibility of such ontological communion. Isolated from their archaeological ground within the sculpture galleries of the British Museum, the statue's symbolic resonance – inextricable from its meticulous aesthetic fashioning – would be 'lost' upon the casual observer. Forster implies that Pater's pronounced sense of a sculptural humanism emerging from the curious materials of the Cnidian soil is a myth as winsomely nostalgic as Rickie Elliot's pastoral fancies in *The Longest Journey*. Forster's reaction to the poignant ordinariness of the Demeter statue denotes his unease that archaeology has produced unsettling concrete evidence of historical disjunction, belatedness, and erasure rather than a building up, an expansion,

¹³ Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by R. H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960-77), II, p. 261.

¹⁴ Benson, *Walter Pater*, p. 73.

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or a copious reserve to be tapped and exploited. And this disquiet constantly vexes his imaginative enterprise to test whether 'the transcendent is immanent in the earthly, that to go down far enough is to go up'.¹⁵ Forster's pursuit of this goal undoubtedly received a vital early stimulus from a web of relationships linking him with another judicious reader of the Cnidian Demeter – Jane Ellen Harrison.

II

Forster was exactly situated to take advantage of the research spearheaded by Jane Harrison and the other Cambridge anthropologists. When Forster went up to King's College, Cambridge, in 1897, he arrived with letters of introduction to the eminent Cambridge botanist Frank Darwin, whose tea parties he attended regularly during subsequent years. Darwin was married to Ellen Crofts, who was Jane Harrison's best friend from her student days at Newnham College, and during the period from 1898, when Harrison herself relocated to Cambridge, to Ellen's death in 1903, 'Aunt Jane' was considered almost a member of the Darwin family. She would 'lunch with my parents almost every Sunday in term', their daughter Frances later recalled.¹⁶ The Darwins, alert to Forster's obsession with classics in general and Greek archaeology in particular, may have mentioned to him Harrison's erudite interest in the recuperative possibilities of Demeter-Persephone and other ancient matriarchal divinities. If the Darwins did not actually facilitate a meeting between Forster and Harrison, then the Stracheys might have: Forster met Lytton Strachey shortly after his arrival in Cambridge and enjoyed his company during the period 1898-1904; Lytton's sister Pernel was one of Harrison's colleagues at Newnham, and their friendship was such that they could travel together to Sweden, with Lytton in tow, for six weeks in 1910.¹⁷

What is most arresting about Forster's 'Cnidus' article is how he wryly measures the sombre grandeur of Demeter's original 'home' against the shop-soiled confines of the British Museum, where the statue now resides 'warm and comfortable in that little recess of hers'.¹⁸ Instead of cultivating a

¹⁵ *Edwardians and Late Victorians*, ed. by Richard Ellmann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 197-98.

¹⁶ Frances Darwin, quoted in Jessie Stewart, *Jane Ellen Harrison*, p. 105.

¹⁷ See Furbank, *E. M. Forster*, pp. 50, 52, 54. See also Peacock, *Jane Ellen Harrison: The Mask and the Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 43, 45, 50, 92, 96, 108, 155-57, 175-76 and 218.

¹⁸ Forster's vision of the 'British Museum' may not be altogether debunking given that Charles Newton had brought to classical scholarship a new appreciation of the value of art and

bitterly sardonic critique of the crude plundering instincts that effect the swift removal of Greek antiquities from indigenous soil to an unpromising lumber-room of antiquarianism,¹⁹ Forster's 'Cnidus' enquires whether the Persephone myth sketches an eternal moment, a basic reshaping of experience that might solace those in his early novels to whom every version of suburban actuality appears irremediably objectionable. The myth might assist the aspiring writer in what Forster regards as his most important task – to 'reveal the hidden life at its source'.²⁰ But in 'Cnidus', the earth-goddess seems little better than Eliotic 'mummified stuff from a museum', not the august conception of fertility myth as 'living material'.²¹ H.D. grumbled that we have had '[e]nough of the tales that speak of the death of the mother',²² for 'Our Lady of the Pomegranate' has become 'trapped in a golden halo', locked away in 'cathedral, museum, cloister'.²³ Forster's 'Cnidus' notes how Demeter, having barely eluded the forces of time and Christianity that disguised, assimilated or banished other primitive divinities, finds herself relegated to a musty, dusty nook, instead of fulfilling her first symbolic duty – to suggest 'a greater spiritual force' that counteracts chilly abstract contemplation, breaking 'through the crust of sceptical common sense'.²⁴

In 'Cnidus' Forster plays with the notion that the British Museum, stocked with myriad 'marble goddesses and gods' (*LJ*, p. 185) approximates to a slightly bizarre twentieth-century parody of an ancient temple, though classical heritage is felt here to be sadly disconnected from the exigencies of a modern moment which has 'heaped fads upon Eleusis, flame under the

archaeology in understanding the past. Whereas a museum in Hardy's youth had been regarded as a collection of aesthetic masterpieces, Newton saw the British Museum as being to archaeologists what a botanical garden is to naturalists: a collection of specimens so arranged that the student is able to learn by comparison of one exhibit with another. See C. T. Newton, 'On the arrangement of the collections of art and antiquities in the British Museum', in *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, pp. 39-72.

¹⁹ For Jane Harrison in the late-1870s it was crucial that her pupils not only read the mythic material but see, feel, and enter into its continuing potency: '[Harrison] was fortunate at Notting Hill that the British Museum was only a few miles away. Teaching the passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* about the rape of Proserpina she would not tell [her pupils] but show them the goddess Demeter 'with the corn-blades in her hair, and the fishes of the Sicilian sea playing around her' [...] She would show them Demeter Thesmophoros – the 'lawgiver' of Ovid – goddess of fixed homes because of agriculture, of marriage and women's rights, worshipped by women in strange mystic ceremonies. She showed them [...] the sculpture of Proserpina bearing in her hand the fateful pomegranate.' Quoted in Annabel Robinson, *Jane Ellen Harrison*, p. 55.

²⁰ Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Arnold, 1974), p. 31.

²¹ T. S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order and Myth', in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey (Oxford: Blackwells, 2005), p. 166.

²² H.D., 'Demeter', p. 17.

²³ H.D., *Tribute to the Angels*, pp. 29-30.

²⁴ R. A. Scott-James, *Modernism and Romance* (London: John Lane, 1908), p. 29.

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rubble'.²⁵ Forster's studied insouciance of tone is puzzling in 'Cnidus', as it remains throughout his fiction, which is impelled by an urgent need to uncover and reinvigorate the primal and perennial energies that the earth-goddess once epitomised 'in the brightly coloured civilisations of the past' (*HE*, p. 20).²⁶ Forster seems partially to endorse Rickie Elliot's Hellenism in *The Longest Journey*, refined amid the gracious repose of a secular and insular Cambridge. Rickie tries

to express all modern life in terms of Greek mythology, because the Greeks looked very straight at things, and Demeter or Aphrodite are thinner veils than 'The survival of the fittest', or [...] other draperies of modern journalism. (*LJ*, p. 178)²⁷

After musing with enigmatic ambivalence on the comic incongruity of the Demeter statue lodged in her cosy little 'recess', rather than within the domestic material culture she once presided over at Cnidus, Forster implies that the benevolent mother-goddess may have 'true immortality' after all. This 'broken' statue positioned behind 'a railing' represents a once pervasive Mediterranean deity whom comparative anthropology had assiduously traced through countless local guises, always emerging, whatever her name and attributes, as the chthonic, mysterious potency who gave cultivation and culture to humanity. What Forster's essay finally indicates is an understated yearning to salvage a sign of the numinous, even of secret allegiance, from the ostensibly melancholy sight of a Demeter relegated to a cramped platform under fizzing electric light as a mere 'memorial to archivists and librarians'.²⁸

Richard Jeffries ruefully remarked that '[n]ature is like a beautiful statue. I must love, must gaze. Yet I cannot put the life into it that I should like to'.²⁹ In Forster's 'Cnidus', Nature has been literally abridged and reduced to a 'beautiful statue', an ornament to occupy the 'gaze' of museum-goers. Forster wishes to recover the goddess within by conflating national and classical values, invoking her in the 'battle against sameness' (*HE*, p. 328), against the emasculating repression of suburban mores that keeps novelty and imaginative freedom at bay. The Hellenised Cambridge intellectual illustrates how the Anglo-Saxon male is ideally situated to cherish, and become revitalised by, the mythified maternal, a timeless force at variance with a

²⁵ Ezra Pound, 'Canto XCVI', in *The Cantos* (London: Faber, 1986), p. 669.

²⁶ See Kenneth Graham, *Indirections of the Novel: James, Conrad, and Forster* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²⁷ See Thomas L. Jeffers, 'Forster's *The Longest Journey* and the Idea of Apprenticeship', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 30 (1988), 179-97.

²⁸ Ezra Pound, 'Canto XCVI', p. 668.

²⁹ Richard Jeffries quoted in Samuel J. Looker and Crichton Porteous, *Richard Jeffries: Man of the fields: A biography and letters* (London: Baker, 1964), p. 211

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feminised suburban domesticity whose persistent policing of behavioural boundaries warps true sexual expression.

I am not going to turn sentimental, and pity the exiled Demeter, and declare that her sorrowful eyes are straining for the scarped rock, and the twin harbours, and Tropa, and the sea. She is doing nothing of the sort. If her eyes see anything, it must be the Choiseul Apollo who is in the niche opposite; and she might easily do worse. And if, as I believe, she is alive, she must know that she has come among people who love her [...] Demeter alone among gods has true immortality. The others continue, perchance, their existence, but are forgotten, because the time came when they could not be loved. But to her, all over the world, rise prayers of idolatry from suffering men as well as suffering women, for she has transcended sex.³⁰

The statue of Demeter becomes an 'idol' for him, and his reflections on seeing the original in Greece denote its overwhelming strength of attraction, as a means of reconciling what he saw as, according to Furbank, 'the male and female in his own nature'.³¹ In Forster's fiction, the Demeter figure is usually an androgynous, elderly presence: Miss Avery and especially Ruth Wilcox, who 'gives the idea of greatness' (*HE*, p. 80) and lives 'nearer the line that divides daily life from a life that may be of greater importance' (*HE*, p. 74).³² But the 'people who love' this earth-goddess the 'most', Forster hints in 'Cnidus', are those 'suffering' Englishmen like himself, who pray at the 'unsuspected shrines' (*LJ*, p. 45) of a Hellenised homophilia.³³ In *The Longest Journey* he divines in this Greek handiwork a mode of reclaiming England on behalf of 'unspeakable[s] of the Oscar Wilde kind',³⁴ thus reauthorizing a sophisticated male fellowship, once extolled in legend by an ancient race, before debilitating domesticity and a Christian dogma of denial usurped it in Western culture. In his early fiction, Forster consistently depicts young women aligned with the homogenising force of consensus, sacrificing their sexuality on the altar of marital 'decency' and economic solvency, with the result that men, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are compelled to endure lives of cheerless suburban confinement, denied that release which the earth-goddess seems to grant the writer of 'Cnidus'.

³⁰ Forster, 'Cnidus', p. 172.

³¹ Furbank, *E. M. Forster*, I, p. 102. See Judith Scherer Herz, 'The Narrator as Hermes: A Study of the Early Short Fiction', in *E. M. Forster: A Human Exploration*, ed. by G. K. Das and John Beer (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 18. .

³² Critics have noted how these fictional maternal figures resemble his maiden great aunt, Marianne Thornton, who helped rear him. See Forster, *Marianne Thornton: A Domestic Biography* (London: Arnold, 1956).

³³ See Scott Bravmann, 'The Lesbian and Gay Past: It's Greek to Whom?', *Gender, Place, and Culture*, 1 (1994), 149-67.

³⁴ Forster, *Maurice* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 159.

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Forster intimates the refreshment flowing from Demeter's capacity to enfranchise the male novelist by showing sexuality as a site of surprise and visionary possibility, unencumbered by the pernicious protocol of bourgeois matrimony. *The Longest Journey* places a tentative though ultimately thwarted faith in equivalences between an unspoiled and bountiful natural milieu ('Nature') and sexual liberality (the dynamics of homosexual 'nature'). This implicitly revises the 'conception of Demeter' Pater supplies in his 1876 essay on the deity, who 'is throughout chiefly human, and even domestic' (GS, p. 148), furnishing little indication of the primitive, ritualistic responses to seasonal flux and the conciliation of demons and spirits inherent in the worship of the goddess at Cnidus. Pater, subtly elaborating what he characterises as Charles Newton's 'divinations' into the essence of the Cnidian Demeter, observes that the original shrine is of 'simple construction, and designed for private use, the site itself having been private property, consecrated by a particular family, for their own religious uses' (GS, p. 141). Pater localises, specifies, and domesticates the shrine, erecting an intricate symbolic structure of home-life as the locus of human culture. What Pater finds in the Cnidian shards and splinters is a dual expression of humble domestic utility and ardent religious sentiment. That the Greeks themselves blended worship and ritual within their very ordinary material culture enables the archaeologist, as Pater puns, to bring 'the every-day aspect of Greek religion home to us' (GS, p. 142).

Forster is also committed to bringing a facet of Greek religion 'home' to English shores. However, his Demeter must be purged of negative associations with Pater's 'every-day' usages of 'private property' in a comfort zone of heterosexual hegemony – what *The Longest Journey* derisively terms the 'suburb'³⁵ (LJ, p. 38) of the South and Midland counties, whose unchecked growth, facilitated by more ambitious road technologies such as macadam and mechanised travel, eroded traditional social divisions policed by class ideologies. Forster's 'suburbia' connotes not just a cultural cul-de-sac in which time is shallow and ownership transitory, but a site of crushing repression, from which Demeter's spiritual offspring, dreaming of decency touched with poetry³⁶, must flee in order to uncover at least a shred of autonomy.

Rural Wiltshire in *The Longest Journey*, and the eponymous country estate in *Howards End* both illustrate Jane Harrison's anthropological

³⁵ The 'suburb' is identified with Sawston, which first appears in Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and returns in *The Longest Journey* (1907). Stuart Christie argues that, '[s]uburban space both expands and contracts class and cultural contact, effectively destabilising the policing of spatial architectonics, such as city versus country, upon which literary representation heretofore depended'. See *Worlding Forster*, p. 21.

³⁶ Forster, *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* (London: Arnold, 1934), p. 116.

concept of sacred space, or 'autochthony': the notion that mystical potencies, which Forster diffidently calls 'the unseen', inhere neither in the heavens nor in ethereal essences but are anchored in the elemental atmosphere of a bucolic hinterland.³⁷ These 'unseen' are redoubtable entities, ancestral spirits endowing landforms, habitations or tombs; they afford a secluded 'home to confront the menacing tumultuous world' (*LJ*, p. 144). Herbert Schneidau registers the centrality of 'autochthony' in *Howards End* and is percipient about Ruth Wilcox's role as mother-goddess, but he says little about how this relates to Harrison's discussion of Demeter in *Prolegomena*, or about the key findings in her research, their impact on classical studies, their transmission and diffusion.³⁸ Harrison proposes that chthonic cults were originally part of an essentially matrilineal culture, one in which collectivity still prevailed over individualism. *Howards End* is ultimately defined by matrilineity, since Ruth Wilcox's house is bequeathed to Margaret Schlegel in spite of Henry Wilcox's various plans for it.

Ruth Wilcox finds in Margaret a genuine successor to the estate. Indeed, the 'higher pleasures' that the house gives Ruth – as a work of art rather than as a stolid commodity – 'rather resemble', according to Forster in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, those vouchsafed 'by religion, and it is impossible to enjoy them without trying to hand them on'.³⁹ Between the female members of Forster's 'aristocracy' there is 'a secret understanding [...] when they meet'⁴⁰ oblivious to the familial allegiance, custom, legal grids, and balance sheets favoured by Henry Wilcox. It is no accident in a novel dealing with material or transcendent legacies and the anthropological enterprise to recoup 'survivals' (*HE*, p. 329) of ancient fertility cult that Forster delineates the fraught pursuance of new property as leases expire and other modern 'barbarisms' take hold. Forster's fascination with these notions shadows the contemporary development of feminism and its corollary, the promulgation of an ethos of gracious friendship that, insofar as it impaired matrimony as a cultural ideal, had profound implications for the imaginative trajectory of *Howards End*. Whereas the traditional Victorian narrative culminated in marriage, Forster queries how a modern author should resolve a fiction given

³⁷ See Harrison's *Prolegomena*: 'It is not that Zeus the Olympian has "an underworld aspect"; it is the cruder fact that he is of the upper air, of the thunder and lightning, extrudes an ancient serpent-demon of the lower world, Meilichios. Meilichios is no foreign Moloch, he is home-grown, autochthonous before the formulation of Zeus' (*PGR*, p. 19).

³⁸ Herbert Schneidau, *Waking Giants: The Presence of the Past in Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

³⁹ Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, ed. by Oliver Stallybrass (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), p. 106.

⁴⁰ Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 73.

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the crisis of 'partnership', and illustrates instead the matrilineal collectivity of the Schlegel sisters inheriting and presiding over the estate.

Forster and D. H. Lawrence, although their eventual quarrel over issues of sexual candour would suggest otherwise, shared not dissimilar views on the role played by sexual vitality in upholding personal and social wellbeing.⁴¹ No two writers could appear on a cursory glance farther apart: one the product of the English public school system, cryptic, cagey and gay; the other working-class, obstreperous, and now linked, in the mainstream imagination at least, with the blunt proclamation of heterosexual passion.⁴² But both are fascinated by the Demeter-Persephone myth and its empowering relevance, infusing vivid colour to the glum 'daily grey' (*HE*, p. 336). In Forster's fictional scheme the story promotes enlarging vistas that would not only depose intractable social expectations, but also exalt the undernourished mythological annals of his homeland.⁴³ His anthropological quest – springing from what Michael Warner expresses as 'dissatisfaction with the regime of the normal'⁴⁴ – to render Demeter's blessings is couched in terms of promulgating a passional experience that cannot subsist in the fortress families of English suburban culture.⁴⁵

Forster's fictions before *A Passage to India* (1924) oscillate anxiously between illustrating earth-worship either as a delicate 'symbol for the

⁴¹ The possibility of direct influences throughout their careers is not to be altogether dismissed. Lawrence may have read *A Room with a View* during the last stages of writing *The White Peacock*, or *The Longest Journey* before writing *Sons and Lovers*, though it seems likely that he read much of Forster's early work together in 1915. Lawrence read *Howards End* in 1911, well before he began *The Rainbow*; it is possible that Forster, in turn, read *Women in Love* before writing *A Passage to India*. Lawrence and Forster first met at a dinner given by Lady Ottoline Morrell on 21 January 1915. Forster described his new acquaintance as 'really extraordinarily nice' in a letter he wrote to Forrest Reid on 23 January. *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. by Lago and Furbank, I, p. 217. See also David Ellis, 'Lawrence and Forster in 1915', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 27 (1998), 1-14.

⁴² In a long letter of 28 January 1915, Lawrence wrote to Forster disclaiming all interest in conventional social distinctions and remarked that in the community he was striving at that period to found ('Rananim') he wanted 'people to come without class or money, sacrificing nothing, but each coming with all his desires, yet knowing that his life is but a tiny section of a Whole: so that he shall fulfil his life in relation to the Whole'. He complained that he had failed to find recruits because, '[e]ach man is so bent on his own private fulfilment'. See *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, gen. ed. James T. Boulton, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979-2000), II, p. 266.

⁴³ In a letter to Forrest Reid written in 1913, Forster, referring to his difficulties with regard to *Arctic Summer*, declares, 'I want something beyond the field of action and behaviour; the waters of the river that rises from the middle of the earth to join the Ganges and the Jumna where they join'. See *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. by Lago and Furbank, I, pp. 187-88.

⁴⁴ Warner, 'Introduction', in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. by Warner (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. xxvii.

⁴⁵ See Lynne Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The Suburbs in Fiction and Culture 1880-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 75-89.

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vanished past', or an urgent 'reality' irradiated by 'Demeter the goddess rejoicing in the spring' (*LJ*, p. 255). The narrator of *Howards End* asks

[w]hy has not England a great mythology? Our folklore has never advanced beyond daintiness, and the greater melodies about our countryside have all issued through the pipes of Greece. Deep and true as the native imagination can be, it seems to have failed here. It has stopped with the witches and the fairies. It cannot vivify one fraction of a summer field, or give names to half a dozen stars. England still waits for the supreme moment of her literature – for the great poet who shall voice her, or, better still, for the thousand little poets whose voices shall pass into our common talk. (*HE*, p. 262)

Forster adumbrates a hearty Hellenised occidental, in which the earth-goddess appears, revived and repositioned, as a proud symbol of the overflowing ripeness of a resplendent bucolic enclave, unblemished by 'suburbia', and its forced vacancies and haemorrhages of surplus personal luggage.⁴⁶ Forster's English Demeter denotes a redeeming spiritual largesse that resides in the civilised, seemingly unchanging feudal plenitude of an idyllic countryside as opposed to the reductive intransigence of imperialist patriarchy which pursues the 'Anglo-Saxon hegemony of the globe' (*LJ*, p. 161).⁴⁷ Forster saw that the ancient myth lent itself to extremely rich and even contradictory accounts that may apply to a whole gamut of psychological situations.⁴⁸ But as *The Longest Journey* acknowledges with increasing desperation, primitive fertility gods had been attenuated either to a hack novelist's outdated affectation or a glib reproach against a desecrating metropolitan modernity.⁴⁹ Rickie Elliot's short story collection *Pan Pipes* signifies the degree to which English 'folklore' is mired in a tweeness divorced from any conception of the earth as 'a living being – or rather a being with a living skin' (*LJ*, p. 232).⁵⁰ Rickie's rhapsodic note of Pan-

⁴⁶ See Lois Cucullu, 'Shepherds in the Parlour: Forster's apostles, pagans, and native sons', *Novel*, 32 (1998), 19-47, for a discussion of the hellenisation of the English countryside with particular reference to *The Longest Journey*.

⁴⁷ See Leticia N. Cavalcanti, 'Forster's Pre-War Novels: Pattern and Rhythm', *Estudos Anglo-Americanos*, 9-11 (1985-1987), 89-102.

⁴⁸ To borrow terms used by L. T. Hobhouse, *The Longest Journey* questions whether Demeter-worship has 'the air of a creed that is becoming fossilized as an extinct form', or revived as 'a living force in the modern world'. See *Liberalism* (London: Butterworth, 1934), pp. 214, 49.

⁴⁹ See Stephen K. Land, *Challenge and Conventionality in the Fiction of E. M. Forster* (New York: AMS, 1990).

⁵⁰ A second member of Forster's pantheon, the half-goat, half-god Pan was a reigning force of fantasy in the early Edwardian period. Forster includes a Pan figure in several of his early stories and novels, usually a member of the lower class who possesses a strong link to nature. Many critics, from his friend Edward Garnett onward, draw connections between Forster's sexual fears or frustrations and his use of Pan figures for sublimation. On Forster's 'sublimations or symbolisations of sex' through Pan figures, see Samuel Hynes, *Edwardian Occasions: Essays on English Writings in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 116-17; Peter Jeffreys, *Eastern Questions*, pp. 14-17.

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worship in these stories may echo Forster's own awkward sense that the suburban comedy of manners infusing his own early tales – marred by naïve idealism, insularity, and ineffectual aestheticism – not only chafes against, but also invalidates his imaginative pursuit of chthonic vitality. As D.H. Lawrence commented in a spiky letter that brings the motto of *Howards End* to bear with mordant verve:

I have just read the Story of a Panic. You with your 'Only Connect' motto, I must say that you reach the limit of splittiness here. You are bumping your nose on the end of the cul de sac.

My angels & devils are nothing compared with your Pan. Don't you see Pan is the undifferentiated root & stem drawing out of unfathomable darkness, & my Angels & Devils are old-fashioned symbols for the flower into which we strive to burst. [...]

You see I know all about your Pan. He is not dead, he is the same forever. But you should not confuse him with universal love, as you tend to do. You are very confused. [...]⁵¹

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Lawrence's critique registers the seriousness with which Forster treated fertility figures in his short stories. Lawrence also senses how susceptible Forster is to the accusation of facetiousness given that Pan, Persephone and other elemental potencies exist in ungainly collocation with a posing, elusively playful ironic mode that stymies any attempt at a forceful fictional method. Forster himself seems to accept the point, given that, at the outset of his literary career, his 'native imagination' cannot finesse a credible indigenous 'folklore' receptive to Hellenic ideals without collapsing into a distracting 'daintiness'.⁵² From a retrospective vantage point, Forster wrote in August 1930:

literature [...] has committed itself too deeply to the worship of vegetation [...] Re-reading my old short stories have [...] forced the above into my mind. It was much easier to write when I believed that Wessex was waiting to return.⁵³

⁵¹ Lawrence continues, 'your Pan is a stooping back to the well head, a perverse pushing back the waters to their source, & saying, the source is everything, which is stupid & an annihilation – but very stupid. In these books, these last, you are intentional & perverse & not vitally interesting. One must live from the source, through all the racings & heats of Pan, and on to my beloved angels & devils, with their aureoles & their feet upon the flowers of light & with their red-mouthed despairs & destructions. However, we wait till you come'. See D. H. Lawrence, Unpublished letter to Forster, 3 February 1915. Quoted in Furbank, *E. M. Forster*, II, p. 8. Lawrence did 'know all about Pan' but while there are stray allusions to the goat-god in Lawrence's early work, frequency of reference occurs only in a series of works dating from 1924 to 1926, such as *St. Mawr*, 'The Last Laugh' and *The Plumed Serpent*. Lawrence's rediscovery of Pan in these later years went along with an increasingly hostile attitude to Forster.

⁵² See Paul B. Armstrong, 'The Narrator in the Closet: The Ambiguous Narrative Voice in *Howards End*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 47 (2001), 306-28; Philip Gardner, 'E. M. Forster and "the Possession of England"', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 42 (1981), 166-83.

⁵³ Forster, *Commonplace Book*, p. 42.

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It could be argued that Forster does not commit himself deeply enough to the 'worship of vegetation', and so falls far short of Hardy's evocation of the animistic undercurrents informing Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native* for instance. This failure impels Forster to transport his restless and dissatisfied protagonists to Italy in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room with a View* (1908).⁵⁴

III

In the early fictions Forster, dismayed by a meretricious and modern Italy, seeks its more illustrious mythic and ancient antecedent. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, his meditations on the earth-goddess are often defined by hesitant, halting attempts to discover a public, plausible mode in which male homoeroticism (the idolatry of 'suffering men' in 'Cnidus') might benefit from a primeval female authority without becoming itself 'dainty', diluted, and effeminate. Rickie Elliot in *The Longest Journey*, craving deliverance 'from the shadow of unreality that had begun to darken the world', wonders if Italy signals emancipation from the pressures of prevailing imperatives: would 'life be there'? He 'thought of Renan, who declares that on the Acropolis at Athens beauty and wisdom do exist, really exist, as external powers' (*LJ*, p. 156). Whereas in *Maurice* (1913-14) Clive Durham's sojourn in Greece marks his nervous retreat from the hero's embrace into classical sublimation, Forster's Italian novels show that a Mediterranean vacation has the opposite effect on Britons who seem to be unwitting captives of a petty provinciality.

In the Italy of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the wearily cynical and hapless pseudo-aesthete Philip Herriton and his travelling companion Caroline Abbott try to regain a radiant vision of spontaneity rebutted by old Mrs Herriton's stolid Sawstonite suburbia: 'Mrs Herriton did not believe in romance, nor in transfiguration, nor in parallels from history, nor in anything else that may disturb domestic life'.⁵⁵ Forster himself is seduced by the callow aesthetic dilettantism that he seems so anxious to exorcise from Philip Herriton, who remodels the untidy and volatile life of the emotions as a

⁵⁴ See Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 1993); Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Margaret Goscilo, 'Forster's Italian Comedies: Que[e]rying Heterosexuality Abroad', in *Seeing Double: Revisioning Edwardian and Modernist Fiction*, ed. by Carola M. Kaplan and Anne B. Simpson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 193-214.

⁵⁵ E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, ed. by Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 23. Hereafter referred to as *WA*.

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manageable, sanitised art-form redolent of Rickie Elliot's fey *Pan Pipes* collection. This is borne out when Philip is bestowed the vision of an apotheosized Caroline, who intervenes to rescue him from the murderous Gino Carella's wrath. The critic John Colmer contends that Caroline is re-imagined as 'an earth-mother'⁵⁶ approximating to Demeter:

All through the day Miss Abbott had seemed to Philip like a goddess, and more than ever did she seem so now. Many people look younger and more intimate during great emotion. But some there are who look older, and remote, and he could not think that there was little difference in years, and none in composition, between her and the man whose head was laid upon her breast. Her eyes were open, full of infinite pity and full of majesty, as if they discerned the boundaries of sorrow, and saw unimaginable tracts beyond. Such eyes he had seen in great pictures but never in a mortal. Her hands were folded round the sufferer, stroking him lightly, for even a goddess can do no more than that. And it seemed fitting, too, that she should bend her head and touch his forehead with her lips. (WA, pp. 151-52)

Gino later conceives of Caroline as 'a superior being – a goddess' (WA, p. 160). Philip also muses that this 'woman was a goddess to the end. For her no love could be degrading: she stood outside all degradation' (WA, p. 160). The fantastic and ludic components of Forster's short stories that dissolve the borderline between suburban mediocrity and 'eternal moments' of individual erotic or imaginative revelation are internalised in the Italian novels as instances of multiplied perception in the face of the arcane, unfamiliar or foreign. In 1908 R. A. Scott-James investigated the concept of a 'moment of perception' that 'should be eternal', 'experienced [...] outside time';⁵⁷ three years later C. F. G. Masterman categorised an 'eternal moment' as 'something that is good in itself apart from remembrance of what has been or anticipation of what shall be'.⁵⁸ That Forster may be showing Philip's breathless perception of Caroline as such an epiphany, evading the exigencies of time, is problematic. Caroline is less the modern equivalent of a pagan fertility deity than a pinched, pallid figure frozen within the sterilising frame of aesthetic spectacle. Her *Pieta* pose complements the 'Virgin and Child, with Donor' from the novel's seventh chapter, in which Philip visits Gino's abode and witnesses Caroline nursing the Italian's infant son. Given Forster's myriad references to paintings of the Madonna and Child or of the Adoration, it is easy to forget the baby's tangible reality as a living being – a product of physical appetite, if not of love. Caroline sat

⁵⁶ John Colmer, *E. M. Forster: The Personal Voice* (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 61.

⁵⁷ Scott-James, *Modernism and Romance*, p. 7.

⁵⁸ C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen, 1911), p. 212.

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with twenty miles of view behind her, and he [Gino] placed the dripping baby on her knee. It shone now with health and beauty; it seemed to reflect light, like a copper vessel. Just such a baby Bellini sets languid on his mother's lap, or Signorelli flings wriggling on pavements of marble, or Lorenzo di Credi, more reverent but less divine, lays carefully among flowers, with his head upon a wisp of golden straw (WA, p. 126)

In both instances Forster's tone encourages scepticism about the possibility of gaining 'Admittance' to a moment in which physical forms are illuminated by revelatory pagan significance. That there may be a nonhuman potency at work seems unlikely given Philip's crippling insufficiencies as an observer. Colmer argues that Philip is here bequeathed a 'transfiguring vision',⁵⁹ but he fails to specify its content. The innermost meaning of the earth-goddess is beyond Philip's narrow rationalism and can only be recuperated through a synthesis of a multiplicity of perceptions. Indeed, his attempt to conserve the scene in hypnotic specificity is completely at odds with Jane Harrison's view of Demeter's fluid majesty, capaciousness of outlook, and intense malleability:

I had often wondered why the Olympians – Apollo, Athena, even Zeus, always vaguely irritated me, and why the mystery gods, their shapes and ritual, Demeter, Dionysus, the cosmic Eros, drew and drew me. I see it now. It is just that these mystery gods represent the supreme golden moment achieved by the Greek [...] The mystery gods are [...] caught in lovely human shapes; but they are life-spirits barely held; they shift and change.⁶⁰

Philip Herriton's temperamental bias is to imprison Caroline in a fussily formalised image of stately and chaste immobility, the very opposite of Harrison's conception of a shape-shifting Demeter 'barely held'. Forster himself remarked in 1915 that 'our supreme choice lies not between body and soul, but between immobility and motion'.⁶¹ Oracular experience in Philip's conception is not continuously and impatiently evolving. Believing that most problems might be rectified through the application of earnest reasonableness, Philip cannot apprehend how 'prophecy' resides 'outside words'.⁶² According to Harrison, 'man has ritual as well as mythology; that is, he feels and acts as well as thinks [...] and out of his feeling and action, projected into his confused thinking, he develops a god'.⁶³ Although magical practices have been renounced, there is in Harrison's thesis an opening for insistent emotions in the unbounded inscrutability of religious ritual. The

⁵⁹ Colmer, *E. M. Forster*, p. 60.

⁶⁰ Harrison, 'The Pillar and the Maiden', *Proceedings of the Classical Association*, 5 (1907), 77.

⁶¹ Forster, *The Prince's Tale and Other Uncollected Writings*, ed. by P. N. Furbank (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 17.

⁶² Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 95.

⁶³ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 161.

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overwhelming forces of sexuality and fertility that Harrison associates with the earth-goddess Demeter are sublimated through Philip's giddy imposition of 'Virgin Mary' status upon Caroline. His skewed view of his companion recalls the visual tableau in which Tess Durbeyfield nearly achieves her 'apotheosis' while baptising the baby Sorrow before her tremulous younger siblings. However, on closer inspection, Philip seems the dubious beneficiary of Angel Clare's whimsical aestheticism, which converts the chaotic flux of immediate emotional response into a rigidly regulated 'portrait' of demure female grace. Clare measures Tess against Greek goddesses Artemis and Demeter; Philip's re-invention of Caroline evokes the Virgin Mother. Both male observers modify the women they see in a way that stifles any sudden or uninhibited articulation of female sexuality.

The 'divine figures of Mother and Child'⁶⁴ may be central to Harrison's anthropology, but Philip Herriton's notion is timid, pious and neurotically antiseptic. Hardy retains a withering detachment from his 'arty' poseur Angel Clare and sternly rebukes his pretensions; Forster's stance towards Philip's perspective is more equivocal, a mixture of severe judgement, uneasy self-reproach, and amused indulgence. The painting analogies in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* connote an unsettling combination of studied aloofness and voyeuristic fascination not only in Philip's standpoint, but in his creator's as well. Like Angel Clare, Forster himself at this point in his literary career wanders in 'an interregnum, between a world which has passed and one not born: not in a new order, but rather in a chaos where a new order must be preparing'.⁶⁵ 'Nature' becomes a flimsy and facile cultural construct; efforts to 'connect' with it often end unhappily. The cultural moment that privileged this aesthetic *experience* of nature over nature itself was distilled in Oscar Wilde's essay 'The Decay of Lying', published in 1891, the same year as Hardy's *Tess*. Wilde derides the hypocrisy of those who wish to recover 'nature', contending that artifice is the essence of civilised living, and that what we read into nature is not intrinsic but a compendium of cosy, culturally accessible images, a deliberate domestication of the Hellenic sublime.⁶⁶

Before Philip arrives on the scene, Caroline finds herself falling in love with Gino, whom she had previously considered obtuse, vulgar and grossly insensitive: '[t]he man was majestic; he was a part of Nature' (WA, p. 125). That Gino appears 'part of Nature' hints at a primitive, pagan element that Philip fails to grasp or perhaps betrays by elevating it to the asexual and chilly aesthetic realm of Christian iconography and notation. This episode

⁶⁴ Harrison, *Themis*, p. 41.

⁶⁵ Edwin Muir, *Transition: Essays on Contemporary Literature* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926), p. 194.

⁶⁶ Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying' in *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by G. F. Maine (London: Collins, 1948), pp. 909-31.

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exemplifies the deeply vexed relation between sexual, pagan potencies associated with Demeter and the asexual Christian priorities in the novel. When Caroline confesses that she is physically attracted towards the Italian, Philip reflects:

[i]n that terrible discovery Philip managed to think not of himself but of her [...] He smiled bitterly at the thought of them together. Here was the cruel antique malice of the gods, such as they once sent forth against Pasiphae. Centuries of aspiration and culture – and the world could not escape it. (WA, p. 159)

Pasiphae, the daughter of Helios the sun-god and wife of Minos, king of Crete, had intercourse with a bull and gave birth to the minotaur, half man and half bull. Philip equates the curse of Pasiphae – her untrammelled lust for an animal – with the English 'earth-goddess' Caroline's inexplicable infatuation with the boorish Italian 'peasant' Gino. Philip's confession places her 'Virgin Mary' status in a mordantly ironic light:

Philip's eyes were fixed on the Campanile of Airola. But he saw instead the fair myth of Endymion. This woman was a goddess to the end. For her no love could be degrading: she stood outside all degradation. This episode, which she thought so sordid, and which was so tragic for him, remained supremely beautiful. (WA, p. 160)

That the foredoomed spinster's lust should not bar her from standing 'outside all degradation' is wishful thinking on Philip's part. Although Phoebe's love for Endymion (a goddess drawn to the human) is not as extreme a miscegenation as Pasiphae desiring the bull (a goddess drawn to an animal), the common theme is that of a shameful, illicit or improper liaison. Philip's shifting of terms from Pasiphae's 'shocking' bestiality to the rarefied and 'fair' Endymion myth is a distinctly sublimating tactic.

As in Forster's first Italian novel, *A Room with a View* focuses on a fraught confrontation between rival behavioural codes: the deadening restrictiveness of English bourgeois propriety measured against the 'pernicious charm' and vibrancy of Florence:

It was Phaethon who drove them to Fiesole that memorable day, a youth all irresponsibility and fire, recklessly urging his master's horses up the stony hill. Mr Beebe recognized him at once. Neither the Ages of Faith nor the Age of Doubt had touched him; he was Phaethon in Tuscany driving a cab. And it was Persephone whom he asked leave to pick up on the way, saying that it was his sister – Persephone, tall and slender and pale, returning with the spring to her mother's cottage, and still shading her eyes from the unaccustomed light. To her Mr Eager objected, saying that here was the thin edge of the wedge, and one must guard against imposition. But the ladies

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interceded, and, when it had been made clear that it was a very great favour, the goddess was allowed to mount beside the god.⁶⁷

The scene, with its abstract and hyperbolic diction, coupled with a tone that is genially whimsical at best, self-parodying at worst, evokes Forster's laboured evocations of the 'Christianised' earth deity Caroline Abbott in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. His framework of classical mythology casts the young Italian coachman as 'Phaethon' and his girlfriend as 'Persephone'. Phaethon asked permission of his father Helios to drive the horses of the sun for a day. He proved unable to control them ('a youth all irresponsibility and fire') and would have set the world ablaze if Zeus had not destroyed him with his thunderbolts. Forster exploits Phaethon rather than the more obvious Helios not only for the pun on the carriage (a phaeton was a light, fast-moving open carriage drawn by a pair of horses), but because the Italian coachman precipitates Lucy Honeychurch's 'disastrous' encounter with George Emerson among the violets. Throughout the Fiesole episode Forster's rendering of the Persephone myth reveals a solemn portentousness that undermines the narrative authority he tries so strenuously to uphold:

[h]e alone had played skilfully, using the whole of his instinct, while the others had used scraps of their intelligence. He alone had divined what things were, and what he wished them to be. He alone had interpreted the message that Lucy had received five days before from the lips of a dying man. Persephone, who spends half her life in the grave – she could interpret it also. Not so these English. They gain knowledge slowly, and perhaps too late. (RV, pp. 90-91)

Persephone's interpretive gift – her instinctual apprehension and sentiments – seems inextricably linked to her *being* as an unmediated, unreflective essence. This construction is almost as 'dainty' as Rickie Elliot's fantasy in *The Longest Journey* of his half-brother Stephen Wonham as the epitome of Hellenised English manhood, whose extrovert virility flows from a national and historic unconscious innately pure, beneficent, and honourable.

Exposure to the jarring actualities of a foreign locale and an unfamiliar culture in the Italian novels has a largely salutary effect on Philip Herriton, Caroline Abbott, and Lucy Honeychurch. Philip, unmercifully manipulated by a fiendish matriarch in England, undergoes a partial intellectualised 'conversion' in Monteriano. Lucy Honeychurch is shocked out of her meekly conventional etiquette at Fiesole, though Forster's tentativeness of address means that these early fictions offer little satisfying reassurance of the enormity or durability of their transfiguring events. Consequently, the earth-

⁶⁷ E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View*, ed. by Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 79. Hereafter referred to as RV.

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goddess is relocated to English shores in *The Longest Journey*⁶⁸ and transmuted through the delicate nascent artist Rickie Elliot's patriotic proclamation that

[w]e've been nearly as great as the Greeks, I do believe. Greater, I'm sure, than the Italians, though they did get closer to beauty. Greater than the French, though we do take all their ideas. I can't help thinking that England is immense. English literature certainly. (*LJ*, p. 51)

IV

In *The Longest Journey* Demeter infuses the 'native imagination' (*HE*, p. 262) with a capability to reconcentrate cultural kudos away from a metropolitan, post-industrial, and imperial 'centre' towards the sombre chalk downs of Wiltshire's 'periphery'. The novel privileges an allegedly timeless and traditional yeomanry, a ruddy-complexioned group of exemplary Hellenised Englishmen personified by Rickie's ingenuous half-sibling Stephen Wonham, 'a man dowered with coarse kindliness, and rustic strength' (*LJ*, p. 195).

Was it only a pose to like this man, or was he really wonderful? He was not romantic, for Romance is a figure with outstretched hands, yearning for the unattainable. Certain figures of the Greeks, to whom we continually return, suggested him a little. One expected nothing of him – no purity of phrase or swift-edged thought. Yet the conviction grew that he had been back somewhere – back to some table of the gods, spread in a field where there is no noise, and that he belonged for ever to the guests with whom he had eaten. (*LJ*, p. 217)

The numerous and pungent references to Demeter in *The Longest Journey* reflect how Rickie Elliot's Hellenistic enthusiasms might furnish the raw materials to foster an imaginary Anglo manliness socialised neither by schoolroom nor drawing-room, but springing from the frank, easy camaraderie of an ancient and pagan land-folk reminiscent of Hardy's Egdonites in *The Return of the Native*. In the exhilarated evocation of Stephen Wonham, the tireless athleticism of classical Greek and weather-beaten stoicism of native Briton fuses with Darwinian natural selection to imply a distinctly homoerotic eugenics. This democratised pageant of aesthetic and spiritual 'virility' is meant to emancipate those like the crippled Rickie Elliot from enervating bourgeois domesticity and a mean philistinism that has imperilled and desexualised masculine culture.

⁶⁸ Although *A Room with a View* was published after *The Longest Journey*, the first drafts of the former were written earlier.

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Central to Rickie's pantheon in *The Longest Journey*, and a complex anticipation of the autochthony in *Howards End*, is his Demeter-like mother Mrs. Elliot, the victim of a loveless marriage and premature death, whom Rickie 'worshipped' and for whom he felt an unwavering sympathy despite the fact that 'she was afraid of intimacy' and 'held her son at a little distance' (*LJ*, p. 26).⁶⁹ Forster's linking of Mrs. Elliott to the goddess of soil and human fertility generates disjunctive ironies tied to Rickie's physical lameness and, by extension, his sexually 'inverted' status. Rickie's fondness for his mother and half-brother as figures of blooming health rests in his own grievous lack of wholeness and physical vitality, borne out by Forster's description in 'Cnidus', of 'the people who love' Demeter most as being all 'so weak-chested and anaemic and feeble-kneed'.⁷⁰ Of Mrs Elliot's progeny, the bastard scion (Stephen Wonham) becomes the heir apparent of a mythified common English ancestry, while the lame legitimate son can confer only the deadly deformity of his emaciated paternity. Mrs. Elliot's spirit hovers over the novel and is embodied in a tattered picture of the Cnidian Demeter adorning Stephen Wonham's bare bedroom.

Here, in the crannies, he [Stephen Wonham] had constructed shelves and cupboards and useless little drawers. He had only one picture – the Demeter of Cnidus – and she hung straight from the roof like a joint of meat. Once she was in the drawing-room; but Mrs Failing had got tired of her, and decreed her removal and this degradation. Now she faced the sunrise; and when the moon rose its light also fell on her, and trembled, like light upon the sea. For she was never still, and if the draught increased she would twist on her string, and would sway and tap upon the rafters until Stephen woke up and said what he thought of her. 'Want your nose?' he would murmur. 'Don't you wish you may get it.' Then he drew the clothes over his ears, while above him, in the wind and the darkness, the goddess continued her motions. (*LJ*, pp. 124-25)

This episode, with its merging of puckish wit and elegiac yearning, contrasts with the rapt depiction of Wonham as the spiritual avatar of Rickie's Cambridge Hellenism, and denotes that the goddess transmits at best only a twilight potency, a waning atavistic passion rather than the new dawn of heightened perception.⁷¹ That the picture hangs (with its associations of public execution) from the roof 'like a joint of meat' conveys a grisly actuality which further drains august nobility from this deity, to whose resuscitation Forster's least popular novel seems committed. This hint of weary resignation evokes the scene of Tess Durbeyfield's 'sacrifice' at Stonehenge, and *The Longest Journey* revisits this pagan site (*LJ*, p. 89) in a

⁶⁹ See M. D. Faber, 'E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*: Double Offspring and Ambivalent Mothers', *Studies in Literature*, 17 (1985), 19-35.

⁷⁰ E. M. Forster, 'Cnidus', p. 176.

⁷¹ James J. Miracky, 'Pursuing (a) Fantasy: E. M. Forster's Queering of Realism in *The Longest Journey*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 26 (2002-2003), 129-44.

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bid to uncover Demeter's animistic undercurrents.⁷² Forster's 'Wiltshire' is imaged as a region replete with precious survivals – a cherished iconography of agrarian Englishness – so as to re-affirm the historical identity of the nation as a sacrosanct expanse of tilled fields, whose dedicated custodians are a Hellenised fraternity of native Britons. Forster attempts to secure Wiltshire's landowning and agrarian heritage as a redemptive and unifying force in a dislocated Edwardian milieu through which Rickie Elliot wanders in search of personal integration and fulfilment.⁷³ That this locale and its ancient vernacular are lent cultural authority signals a decisive shift in Forster's fiction, which *Howards End* elaborates, away from Italy as his primary site of pastoral recuperation.

As the narrator states, the heart of Wiltshire – and the spiritual centre of *The Longest Journey* – is Cadbury Rings, 'a double circle of entrenchments' (*LJ*, p. 102), erected in the pre-Christian period:

[Cadbury] Rings were curious rather than impressive. Neither embankment was over twelve feet high, and the grass on them had not the exquisite green of Old Sarum, but was grey and wiry. But Nature (if she arranges anything) had arranged that from them, at all events, there should be a view. The whole system of the country lay spread before Rickie, and he gained an idea of it that he never got in his elaborate ride. He saw how all the water converges at Salisbury; how Salisbury lies in a shallow basin, just at the change of the soil. [...] He saw Old Sarum, and hints of the Avon valley, and the land above Stonehenge. [...] Chalk made the dust white, chalk made the water clear, chalk made the clean rolling outlines of the land, and favoured the grass and the distant coronals of trees. Here is the heart of our island: the Chilterns, the North Downs, the South Downs radiate hence. The fibres of England unite in Wiltshire, and did we condescend to worship her, here we should erect our national shrine. (*LJ*, p. 132)

Mary Butts incorporates the Demeter-Persephone myth into her re-imagining of Hardy's Wessex and its pagan 'shrines' as the luxuriant locus of a heterosexual bond that will refresh England's national fortunes. Forster, by contrast, exploits Cadbury Rings to denote how Demeter's soil might further the ideal of instinctual male comradeship over the strictures of bourgeois marriage. The Rings, an ancient military burial ground, marks a pivotal phase in the growth of Rickie's relationship with his half-brother Stephen, the spiritual child of the Rings. Rickie reads a passage from Shelley's 'Epipsychidion', a favourite poem from his Cambridge days, and inspiration for the novel's title, which warns against embarking upon 'the dreariest and the longest journey' of matrimony. However, Rickie's reverie is shattered by the appearance of his aunt Emily Failing and his fiancé Agnes, with Stephen

⁷² See Daniel J. Cahill, 'E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* and Its Critics', *Iowa English Bulletin*, 15 (1970), 39-49.

⁷³ See Rae H. Stoll, "'Aphrodite with a Janus Face': Language, Desire, and History in Forster's *The Longest Journey*", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 20 (1987), 237-59.

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in tow. Initially unresponsive to Mrs. Failing's clipped references to Stephen as his half-brother, Rickie finally grasps her revelation at the centre of the 'shrine' as visions of unaffected and spontaneous fraternity give way to nightmares of filial corruption: the 'visible form' of the past – cultural as well as family heritage in addition to the natural order – 'gaped ever wider, like an unhallowed grave' encircling him, leading him to 'faint among the dead' (*LJ*, p. 137).

It is Rickie who undertakes Persephone's chthonic voyage of discovery, but upon his return to daylight consciousness, he reacts with 'a cry, not of horror but of acceptance' (*LJ*, p. 137) and calls out to Stephen. The earth 'he had dreaded lay close to his eyes, and seemed beautiful' (*LJ*, p. 138). But Agnes rushes in to prevent their mystical union in an eroticised and classicised environment that seems to offer a return 'to the Greek ideal of beauty as a panacea for the ills of modern society',⁷⁴ as one reviewer remarked in 1922. The conflict articulated in Shelley's poem is manifest here, as Rickie cannot establish an enduring and sincere link with his half-brother until the incubus of his exclusive heterosexual contract is sloughed off. Heterosexual courtship and marriage is coded here, not as the Englishman's first moral and patriotic duty, but as a trap working against the mythified maternal whose hierophants are the men who share Forster's orientation, discerning gaze, and classical erudition.⁷⁵

In these Wiltshire downs, Forster hopes Demeter's presence might yet be felt flowing through the sacred soil and clean white chalk. The qualification ('did we condescend to worship her' (*LJ*, p. 132)) ruefully registers how the earth-goddess might be reclaimed as the emblem of a queerly mystical project, given the extent to which the narration extols male erotic comradeship while refusing to validate heterosexual marriage either as a credible sociological phenomenon or as a worthwhile fictional convention. Forster may have savoured the grotesquely comic irony that the Demeter of Cnidus, ensconced in its 'little recess' in the British Museum, would have received more half-hearted and desultory 'visitors' than this 'national shrine' priestly devotees. And the insistence on Nature's highly stylised 'arrangements', coupled with the 'system of the country' (*LJ*, p. 132), conjures up not the forbidding sweep of Hardy's Egdon Heath, but the artificial green world of William Beckford's Fonthill estate in Wiltshire.

⁷⁴ Unsigned notice in *Boston Evening Transcript* (19 April 1922), cited in Gardner, *E. M. Forster: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 98.

⁷⁵ See A. A. Markley, 'E. M. Forster's Reconfigured Gaze and the Creation of a Homoerotic Subjectivity', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 47 (2001), 268-94. Markley avers that while Forster's novels can be read as 'straight' by mainstream audiences, they simultaneously permit a gay male readership to identify in them a distinctively homoerotic subtext, a subjectivity that endorses a reading that strays from the conventional hetero-normative assessment.

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The Longest Journey, however much it strives to refashion rural southwest England as a classless sanctuary for a hardy, amative manliness, ultimately concedes that 'the Pastoral' mode has been robbed 'of its lingering romance'. Is there 'no poetry and no thought in England? Is there no one, in all these downs, who warbles with eager thought the Doric lay?' (*LJ*, p. 93) These mannered rhetorical questions denote that Rickie Elliot is only 'pretending that Greek gods were alive' (*LJ*, p. 156), buttressed by his galling sense that he has aggressively stylised his half-brother. Rickie's faith in Demeter's 'earth' collapses; he realises that he has not been standing 'behind things' after all, but beyond them: '[t]he whole affair [...] was a ridiculous dream' (*LJ*, p. 303):

Rickie was heroic no longer. Turning round in his chair, he covered his face. The man was right. He did not love him, even as he had never hated him. In either passion he had degraded him to be a symbol for the vanished past. The man was right, and would have been lovable. He longed to be back riding over those windy fields, to be back in those mystic circles, beneath pure sky. Then they could have watched and helped and taught each other, until the world was a reality, and the past not a torn photograph, but Demeter the goddess rejoicing in the spring. Ah, if he had seized those high opportunities! For they led to the highest of all, the symbolic moment, which, if a man accepts, he has accepted life (*LJ*, p. 255)

Rickie wilfully misconstrues 'the earth' just as surely as he mishandles the lump of clay he accidentally drops on Emily Failing's fragile china cup. What Rickie cannot extract from 'Demeter the goddess' is unfeigned participation as well as cerebral apprehension: the myth as an entry-point into a numinous salute to a fertility that not only abides, but ratifies same-sex togetherness. *The Longest Journey* implies that Rickie's tragic flaw is not so much a strangulated incapacity to inhabit Forster's unique conception of the myth, but rather a failure to finesse a literary language that would make it seem pressing, believable, and pertinent. The goddess remains for him 'a torn photograph', and his breathless prospect of Wiltshire's animistic contours declines into an imagined state of entropy: '[i]n time the fire at the centre will cool, and nothing can go on then' (*LJ*, p. 232).

V

In *Howards End*, the quest for a genuine 'shrine' of Demeterian verve, positioned outside institutional culture and civic spaces, becomes more urgent, though less receptive to a cathartic homoerotic possibility, that 'tiny

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world [...] generally unknown to all who are not born in it'.⁷⁶ *Howards End* revisits the core concern of Forster's 'Cnidus' and *The Longest Journey*: can Demeter be successfully 'relocated' to southwest England's 'radiant earth' (*LJ*, p. 126), as a site where she is 'loved' and worshipped? *The Longest Journey* signifies Hellenic awareness as a curative for the stultifying lethargy induced by 'suburbia' – a primal knowledge naturalised in the distinctive chalky terrain of the Wiltshire countryside where 'the power of the earth grows stronger' (*LJ*, p. 269). This site is infused with the dust of partially forgotten tribes who 'found the crisis of their lives upon Stonehenge' (*LJ*, p. 247).⁷⁷

Endeavours to weave the Demeter-Persephone myth into the imaginative fabric of the Italian novels succumbs to the crippling 'cosiness' against which *Howards End* rails, as it reassesses Anglocentric pastoral principles founded upon an intricate symbolic topography. The novel is dominated by images of rupture and exclusion from a nativist Eden increasingly threatened by self-regarding agents of metropolitan modernity.⁷⁸ Surveying the Wiltshire Downs in *The Longest Journey*, Rickie Elliot muses,

he could not imagine a place larger than England. And other people talked of Italy, the spiritual fatherland of us all. Perhaps Italy would prove marvellous. But at present he conceived it as something exotic, to be admired and revered, but not to be loved like these unostentatious fields. (*LJ*, p. 132)

The 'unostentatious fields' of the national landscape act as a receptacle for personal sentiment that emerges all the more passionately in *Howards End*

⁷⁶ Forster to Florence Barger regarding *Maurice*, in *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. by Lago and Furbank, I, p. 223.

⁷⁷ In *The Longest Journey*, Forster invests his descriptions of the Wiltshire chalk-lands with an anthropological intensity that owes a special debt to Hardy's sense of the ancient strata underlying the modern settlements of southwest England. 'Wiltshire is not a county of heavy tints. Beneath these colours lurked the unconquerable chalk, and wherever the soil was poor it emerged. The grassy track, so gay with scabious and bedstraw, was snow-white at the bottom of its ruts. A dazzling amphitheatre gleamed in the flank of a distant hill, cut for some Olympian audience. And here and there, whatever the surface crops, the earth broke into little embankments, little ditches, little mounds; there had been no lack of drama to solace the gods'. (*LJ*, p. 116)

⁷⁸ Scholars have situated *Howards End* differently: as the illustrative, if problematic, Edwardian precursor to Forster's subsequent 'modernist' achievements along the routes of empire see Fredric Jameson, 'Modernism and Imperialism', in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, ed. by Seamus Deane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 43–64. David Gervais regards the novel as the progenitor of popular English texts, post-World War One, in the English 'country house' tradition in *Literary Englands: Versions of 'Englishness' in Modern Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Stuart Christie sees the novel as 'the author's most sustained, if not most recognised, treatment of the impact of imperial culture upon the Edwardian mind' in *Worlding Forster*, p. 7.

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due to its sense of the grievous loss which is a structural requirement of the capitalist investment that Henry Wilcox practises. Forster tries to deflect this loss through a narrative focus on uncovering animistic drives. But the novel is painfully aware of, without being able convincingly to temper, the elegiac excesses which typify Rickie Elliot's prospect of the Wiltshire soil as a hermetically sealed, classless realm beyond the highly stratified, dynamic orbit of metropolitan mores.

In *The Longest Journey* Forster utilizes a lexicon of Greek myths to aestheticise its affective relations in a manner that discredits and demeans bourgeois women's suburban role. This liminal misogyny, undermining feminine dominion over the household by extolling a purer instinctual link discerned in the native son's racialised gusto, is replaced in *Howards End* by a reconfigured female elect. This elect is governed by the 'earth-mother' Ruth Wilcox, who conserves the mystical agrarian space once tended by Stephen Wonham. Forster's social and national panorama relies on separating the process of accumulation and deficit into two apparently isolated and morally opposed spheres: imperialist aspiration signalled by investment capitalism and etiolated spirituality on the one hand, and on the other, a resiliently gentle vision of a sacred cultural legacy both personal and communal and rooted in a respect for memories and unbroken continuity with the ancestral past. However, Forster's narrator calls for a commitment to various unifying myths even as he exposes the uneasy epistemological foundation upon which social symbols depend for their eloquent authority. The problem with *Howards End* is that it invites us to share a belief in autochthony which readers cannot help but doubt and challenge because the narrator sustains it with only moderate success.

The Longest Journey's repeated reproaches against the ever-expanding cityscape and the 'modern spirit' whose unceasing flux of destruction and renovation melts away barriers between city and country seems to be viewed with jaundiced ennui in *Howards End*. Forster's narrator accepts the strain of upholding the pastoralised treatment of bucolic landscape as a figure reinscribing an essential Englishness, whose articulation has become ancillary to cultural discourse. It is no accident that *Howards End* privileges an insouciant urbanite and enlightened Edwardian feminist Margaret Schlegel as the matriarchal re-poseessor of a country estate, to whose subterranean rhythms she is unexpectedly attuned. The young woman who eventually inherits the role of high priestess appreciates the function of the train – starting from King's Cross, the gateway to 'Infinity' – that will transport her to Howards End and to 'the eternal differences' that comprise a more vivid and diversified conception of Englishness. In a novel often fretful about technological encroachments and rapidly changing perceptions of quotidian

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experience, it is an impish tactic to have Margaret conveyed in this fashion to Ruth Wilcox's magic garden. As Stuart Christie contends,

Forster stages [...] class dislocation and urbanization as the kinetic backdrop to Margaret's own steady rise in fortune and her transformation from travelling German romantic of the Friedrich Schlegel school (like her father and sister) to [...] landed British subject.⁷⁹

Yet this elevation to 'landed British subject' requires that we welcome myths of the land and the past as transcendental synthesizing powers, miraculously salvaging a rustic community, which is deeply problematic in a novel acutely alert to how symbols may only be contingent rhetorical conventions.

Aware that the trendy alliance between popular taste and modernity renders the rustic dirge clichéd, even anachronistic, Forster's narrator affects the tone of idiosyncratic poseur and counsels patience to those who still 'care for the earth with sincerity':

[t]o speak against London is no longer fashionable. The Earth as an artistic cult has had its day, and the literature of the near future will probably ignore the country and seek inspiration from the town. One can understand the reaction. Of Pan and the elemental forces the public has heard a little too much – they seem Victorian, while London is Georgian – and those who care for the earth with sincerity may wait long ere the pendulum swings back to her again. (*HE*, p. 116)

The use of 'one' aims for a lofty impersonality of truth and the consensus to which authoritative proclamations aspires. However, this underplays the narrator's parodic invocation of the norm and self-conscious staging of convention, which denotes a transgressive glee in double meanings. His coy, self-undermining duplicity of tone is such that he refutes orthodox opinion while seeming to bolster it, implying a tender affection for the countryside and the 'Earth' through his very explanation of the myriad allurements and advantages of the bustling metropolis.

The 'Earth as an artistic cult', which *The Longest Journey* approaches through Rickie's breathless survey of Wiltshire as the locus for a 'national shrine' (*LJ*, p. 132), a county uniting all the 'fibres of England', is ostensibly treated as hackneyed in *Howards End*, insofar as it mocks Leonard Bast's painfully earnest desire to get back to the earth by strolling through Wimbledon woods. Forster's narrator rewrites and recalibrates a modernist aesthetic founded upon social collapse, subordinating the oft-repeated lament for a vanished common culture to the imagined refreshment of its conditions of opportunity and audacious experiment. As Forster described it, Pan was

⁷⁹ Christie, *Worlding Forster*, p. 146.

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'in the air'⁸⁰ and popular Edwardian fiction, replete with pastoral fantasy tales like Rickie Elliot's *Pan Pipes*, was crowded with satyrs and nymphs and set in enchanted woods and dells: '[f]antasy [...] flits over the scenes of Italian and English holidays'.⁸¹ Although the narrator registers how 'Pan' as an embodiment of pagan strength has lost its freshness, *Howards End* refuses completely to disavow the idealised recreations of a traditional rural milieu that distinguish earlier fictions.⁸² Acting as if adhering to conventional opinion about the superiority of urban values only subtly to derail it, he appears to sanction the mainstream majority's preference even as he utters a quiet opposition to, even a distinctive difference from, 'the public'.

The swing of the 'pendulum' hints that the narrator has not discounted the possibility of a contrary movement, an enlivening return to a literary mode that proposes the rustic refuge not as a wilfully naïve image of 'Englishness', but as a credible means of measuring, rather than falsifying or evading, 'this continual flux of London [...] an epitome of us at our worst' (*HE*, p. 179).⁸³ Just because 'speaking against London is no longer fashionable' does not mean autochthony is misguided, or that it should be unmasked and dismissed altogether. Indeed *Howards End* offers Ruth Wilcox as a Demeter figure who maintains, with serene tenacity, 'the instinctive wisdom the past can alone bestow' (*HE*, p. 36).⁸⁴ Ruth Wilcox's atavistic 'wisdom' has been interpreted either as an excuse for syrupy sentimentality, or as a ruse for marketing the wistful backward glance to sponsor a nationalist-hegemonic agenda.⁸⁵ But here Forster is trying to reprogram nostalgia; it is what George Behlmer and

⁸⁰ Colmer, *E. M. Forster*, pp. 28-29.

⁸¹ Forster, 'Introduction', in *The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories* (London: Vintage, 1976), p. v.

⁸² See Brian May *The Modernist as Pragmatist: E. M. Forster and the Fate of Liberalism* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1997); Mike Edwards, *E. M. Forster: The Novels* (London: Macmillan, 2001).

⁸³ Margaret Schlegel's characterisation here of London as 'eternal formlessness' (*HE*, p. 179) evokes Masterman's account of the metropolis as 'a population, a nation in itself; breeding, as it seems, a special race of men'. The insatiable city, a site of unappeasable desires and acute disenchantment, threatens to devour the stability of the green Anglo-Saxon island: 'London only stimulates, it cannot sustain'. See *The Condition of England*, pp. 88 and 147. In 1902 Masterman warned that '[i]n the long struggle between the town and the country the former must eventually conquer; for always it has steadily advanced, never has it surrendered any of its acquisitions'. See *From the Abyss: Of Its Inhabitants by One of Them* (London: Garland, 1980), p. 15.

⁸⁴ See Colmer, *E. M. Forster*, p. 6.

⁸⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, and Richard Terdiman reserve special wrath for commodified nostalgia, such as national projects of 'commemoration', the selling of souvenirs and keepsakes, or the promotion of an idealised domestic interior, as strategies by which governments and commercialists entrance citizens and consumers. See *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

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Fred Leventhal designate as 'a strategy for coping with change, loss, or anomie. The nostalgic view [...] can provide an integrative service by reassuring individuals (and nations) that continuity [...] exists between former and current conditions'.⁸⁶

Forster's Demeter-worship exploits a number of key symbols to promote this 'continuity'. *Howards End* privileges the synthesizing powers of the titular house's 'Druidic' spirit, hay in the meadow, the wych-elm tree and the miraculous healing force of its embedded pigs' teeth. Ruth Wilcox enters the narrative in the third chapter carrying 'a wisp of hay': she belongs 'to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it' (*HE*, p. 36). In her company, Margaret, reflecting on her own myopic social coterie, becomes 'conscious of a personality that transcended their own and dwarfed their activities' (*HE*, p. 80). Ruth Wilcox is portrayed as a softly spoken guardian of perennial values in a 'holy place' (*LJ*, p. 23), purified of commercial taint and stubbornly set against the uprooted subjectivities of suburbia that connotes 'a huge apparatus of waste'.⁸⁷

That many readers continue to find the claims made for Ruth Wilcox's mythic grandeur as earth-mother implausible reveals the extent to which Forster's narrator himself is torn between a commitment to autochthony and exposing the artificiality and contestability of any bond based on a community's shared myths. Lawrence's *The Lost Girl* sanctions the extraordinary fructifying capacity of ancient myth with a febrile intensity. He asserts the ability of signs to function as mediators without being troubled by how this power is neither intrinsic to them nor founded upon any transcendental legitimacy, but instead depends wholly on our eagerness (or credulity?) to approve and circulate them. What if the *connecting* energies of myths and symbols hinted that mediation was little more than a glib, strictly finite rhetorical manoeuvre, rather than a transcendent mystery? With sly legerdemain, Forster's narrator in *Howards End* offers readers symbols and archetypes while nervously probing how their rhetorical verve is generated. So Ruth Wilcox's mystical aura may simply be the physical tics of a wayward and elderly eccentric, given her inability to inspire spiritual growth in her hardnosed husband and children.

The metaphors of organicism and dynamic natural potency clustered around the figure of Ruth Wilcox 'create new sanctities' (*HE*, p. 159) – an alternative model of time that evidences a reconfigured relationship with an ancient heritage without lapsing into numbing stasis. *Howards End* unearths a nexus between dateless antiquity and a bewildered modern moment so as to

⁸⁶ See *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia, and Identity in Modern British Culture*, ed. by George K. Behlmer and Fred M. Leventhal (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 7.

⁸⁷ Masterman, *The Condition of England*, pp. 42-43.

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retain a classical heritage, its sacred rituals, rhythms, and ghosts, the 'unburied dead' who, like Ruth Wilcox, seem to touch the contours of a landed estate with spectral fingertips.⁸⁸ This is part of the narrator's fictional project to render the 'nation' as a precious object of documentary observation, a knowable unit of cultural and social relations, rather than as a fractured and desiccated cityscape which 'neglect[s] the poise of the earth, and the sentiments she has decreed' (*LJ*, p. 269). But like the bizarre efficacy of the healing pigs' teeth, Ruth Wilcox has only the gifts others ascribe to her through their readiness to discard scepticism – specifically Margaret Schlegel and the narrator. For those agnostics like the other Wilcoxes and many recent commentators, her specific actions possess scant force for transcendent synthesis and evince the permeable, shifting boundary between vitalising myth and fanciful superstition.

Forster's narrator seems emphatic about one of the great curses of contemporary culture: '[t]he feudal ownership of land did bring dignity, whereas the modern ownership of moveables is reducing us again to a nomadic horde' (*HE*, p. 154). The 'nomadic horde' denotes Leonard Bast's nascent, though ultimately derailed, class mobility: his tendency to wearily traverse, rather than progress, to savour movement without self-improvement. *Howards End* is cagey though about the ironic symbiotic relationship between a desire for continuity and purity in Demeter's rustic garden, and the concomitant rise of commercial ventures that marketed this purity through advertising elegantly timeworn country homes anchored in regional history. Though tied to an agricultural economy, this 'authentic' history was theoretically divorced from grubby monetary transactions and the crass one-upmanship Henry Wilcox employs to dominate every situation. Forster camouflages the role of commerce in buttressing the 'richness' of *real* estate by reverting to cloudy abstraction:

[m]ost of us see the past as a swamp. Events do not flow past us; they neither go down into the mighty ocean nor are they lost in the sand; no, their behaviour is otherwise; the moment they move out of our physical reach they begin to sway and interlock, and they remain quite near. It is no wonder that amateurs all through the ages have indulged in incantations, and have hunted for the Word, the Gesture, the Sensation which should evoke their unburied dead, and bring back the richness and sweetness which had scarcely ceased to breathe.⁸⁹

Forster's narrator, despite his edgy evasions in matters of primitive or pagan sexuality in the Italian novels, proposes in *Howards End* that archaic beliefs such as autochthony are piercingly vivid in ways that those in thrall to

⁸⁸ See David Medalie, *E. M. Forster's Modernism* (London: Palgrave, 2002).

⁸⁹ Forster, *The Prince's Tale*, p. 323.

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the expedient absolutism favoured by Henry Wilcox cannot, or will not, openly register. Yet the reader still asks whether the spirit of place may be intrinsic to a specific milieu, or whether it is merely a product of investments of belief to be exploited by Forster's narrator even as he tempts us to embrace them as genuine. *Howards End* is structured to invite a literal assessment of offhand metaphors such as Margaret Schlegel's proposition that '[h]ouses are alive. No?', which refines Forster's impression in *The Longest Journey* that 'a house does speak more clearly than the people who live in it' (*LJ*, p. 38). In deprecating these remarks, critics tend to forget that Forster's writing shadowed the popular vernacular movement in British home building. The popular magazine *Country Life* was launched in 1897, and was devoted to selling, decorating, and maintaining the country house for a ready public. Architects such as Edwin Lutyens comprehended the worth (in more than a mystical sense) of manifesting time's unflinching rigour on a building that is a composite of architectural styles from different eras, whose interiors and the weathered furniture within them might permit a visible trace of communion with, or a 'time travel route' back to, Forster's 'unburied dead'.⁹⁰

In *Howards End* the habitation represents an intersection of disparate temporal zones and exudes an ambiguous energy that reverberates through the surrounding countryside. The 'eternal moment' (*HE*, p. 155) makes multiple pasts and the present accessible to the likes of the Schlegel sisters in one instant of galvanized sensation: 'England was alive, throbbing through all her estuaries, crying for joy through the mouths of all her gulls, and the north wind, with contrary motion, blew stronger against her rising seas' (*HE*, p. 178). This is an endeavour, refined by Mary Butts, not so much to commodify nostalgia, but to objectify and fortify Englishness with knowledge of its ancient and classical proportions; to consolidate its sources of strength within an integrated, insular culture marked by breeding, lineage, and blood-lines. Although Forster tries to illustrate how the personal and domestic spaces in *Howards End* are assimilated and eventually eclipsed by the promptings of Demeter's mystical realm, the 'unseen' can be fashioned, packaged, and purchased in a scrupulously redesigned ancestral home. This literally *buys time*, and throws into ironic relief weighty, high-minded propositions such as 'our life is a state of some importance, and our earth not a place to beat time on' (*LJ*, p. 266).

⁹⁰ Like Philip Webb and Norman Shaw, Lutyens designed domestic homes that appeared old but were not merely copies of earlier designs. Lutyens built a wide range of houses and commercial structures both in England and India, as well as numerous war memorials after 1918. From his office in Bloomsbury Square, Lutyens planned houses for clients much like Henry Wilcox: new industrialists or entrepreneurs who wanted a house that exuded a temporal density. See Peter Inskip, *Edwin Lutyens* (London: Academy Editions, 1986).

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Until recently, *Howards End* was read either as a tragicomedy of manners or as a bourgeois-liberal drama. Scholarly orthodoxy reiterates the mantras deployed by the Schlegel sisters – ‘panic and emptiness’, ‘telegrams and anger’ – to assert their disavowal, whether sneering or indulgent, of the lifestyle embraced by the affluent but coarse-grained Wilcox clan, whose front of impregnable family solidarity veils an absence of true intimacy and trust. Lionel Trilling’s seminal critique probes the ‘mythical fantasy’ of Forster’s early fiction, and deplores how allusions to Greek myth impair the tone and verbal texture of the Italian novels.⁹¹ Trilling opines that *Howards End*’s greater technical assurance depends on its ruthless subordination of the mythical motifs to a pressing social and humanitarian goal. The concealed references to Demeter-Persephone suggest that the opposite is true. Indeed the mythic mode in *Howards End*, though less immediately apparent, is far more pervasive than in the Italian novels.

In dramatizing the mythological theme of the ancient earth-goddess, ‘a symbol of regeneration and of the birth of life from life’ (*LJ*, p. 232), Forster supplies a telling link between his friends Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence and Mary Butts, in works such as *The Lost Girl* and *Death of Felicity Taverner*. Butts avers that modern culture has erroneously prioritised human nature at the expense of the phenomenal world by formulating an anthropomorphic concept of existence that foregrounds rampant commercialism, science, and psychoanalysis. Her 1932 pamphlet *Traps for Unbelievers* wishes to recover the unseen as a feminised conception of religious experience. *Howards End* prefigures this striving after feminised ‘vistas’ (*HE*, p. 192) to counteract the processes of atomisation and the elevation of clinical rationality that Harrison saw as synonymous with the Olympian patriarchy: ‘the highly personalized, individualized god is fashioned on the highly personalized, individualized self’.⁹²

VI

The opening gambit of *Howards End* focuses on a cheerfully chatty and apparently inconsequential letter from Helen Schlegel to her sister Margaret, describing the house, its trees, and spacious grounds, but every haphazard detail reveals the novel’s distinctive anthropological consciousness. The letter introduces the person Helen cannot know is the presiding spirit of the habitation, Ruth Wilcox, née Ruth Howard:

⁹¹ Trilling, *E. M. Forster*, pp. 11-12.

⁹² Harrison, *Themis*, p. 473.

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[t]his long letter is because I'm writing before breakfast. Oh, the beautiful vine leaves! The house is covered with a vine. I looked out earlier, and Mrs. Wilcox was already in the garden. She evidently loves it. No wonder she sometimes looks tired. She was watching the large red poppies come out. Then she walked off the lawn to the meadow, whose corner to the right I can just see. Trail, trail, went her long dress over the sopping grass, and she came back with her hands full of the hay that was cut yesterday – I suppose for rabbits or something, as she kept on smelling it. (*HE*, pp. 19-20)

Helen's account of Ruth Wilcox carrying the hay with genial indifference to her attire, adumbrates her keen affinity for 'the genius' of 'place' (*LJ*, p. 63), and in the closing pages the Schlegel sisters enact half-consciously her bequeathed insights: the chapter is framed by an opening in which the 'sacred centre' (*HE*, p. 325) of the hay field is about to be harvested, and a finale in which Helen articulates more than she knows: "[t]he field's cut!" Helen cried excitedly – "the big meadow! We've seen to the very end, and it'll be such a crop of hay as never!" (*HE*, p. 332). This is not only the novel's resolution but also concludes the extended temporal perspective that looks through pagan antiquity into an eternal present which Forster terms 'the Now' (*HE*, pp. 249, 315, 323), as the women continue to search for recognition in a male-dominated cosmos.⁹³ Forster deploys the hay motif as a double framing, not just of the closing chapter, but of the entire narrative arc: it signals the initial appearance of Ruth Wilcox in Helen's letter as Demeter's theophany, the hay her cereal icon.

Unlike *Tess*, in which the connection between what Jane Harrison terms 'the processes of agriculture'⁹⁴ and women is complicated by Hardy's tormented perception that a mystical legacy to the female farm-worker has been irredeemably sullied, Forster revives the primitive link between Mrs Wilcox and the land she cherishes and clings to with unassertive yet magisterial grace. Forster reiterates the hay motif so often that commentators who deplore his autochthony tend to judge the image clumsily obtrusive – Mrs Wilcox is said to be 'a wisp of hay, a flower' (*HE*, p. 74) – and at the climax the same phrase refers to 'death' (*HE*, p. 330). As Harrison explains in *Themis*:

[t]he Olympian gods [...] seemed to me like a bouquet of cut-flowers whose bloom is brief, because they have been severed from their roots. To find those roots we must

⁹³ See Sylvia Brinton Perera, *Descent to the Goddess: A Way of Initiation for Women* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1981); Barbara Walker, *The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom, and Power* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985); Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989).

⁹⁴ See Marianna Torgovnick, 'Discovering Jane Harrison', in *Seeing Double*, ed. by Kaplan and Simpson, pp. 131-48; K. J. Phillips, 'Jane Harrison and Modernism', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 17 (1991), 465-76; Mary Beard, *The Invention of Jane Harrison* (Harvard University Press, 2000).

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burrow deep into a lower stratum of thought, into those chthonic cults which underlay their life and from which sprang all their brilliant blossoming.⁹⁵

In her conception 'Demeter becomes more and more agricultural, more and more the actual corn' (*PGR*, p. 275). She represents fructifying, sacrificial death – 'the earth, brown, wet, and odorous [...] engaged [...] on its yearly duty of decay' (*LJ*, p. 24) – and in that sense enacts the role of sacred maiden as well as that of nurturing mother: she disappears to emerge in replenished forms of life, organic and inorganic. Mrs Wilcox is incarnate in the ancestral home and field as well as in some of the characters, notably Margaret Schlegel, who becomes 'Mrs Wilcox', and is so addressed at the resolution, even by the demoralised and embittered Wilcox clan themselves.

Helen Schlegel's initial letter refers to the hay fever afflicting the other members of the Wilcox family:

[l]ater on I heard the noise of croquet balls, and looked out again, and it was Charles Wilcox practising; they are keen on all games. Presently he started sneezing and had to stop[...]. And finally Mrs. Wilcox reappears, trail, trail, still smelling hay and looking at the flowers. (*HE*, p. 20)

Much later the novel's sibylline figure, Miss Avery, mentions the Wilcox hay fever with vindictive gusto: '[t]here's not one Wilcox that can stand up against a field in June – I laughed fit to burst while he [Henry] was courting Ruth [...] This house lies too much on the land for them' (*HE*, p. 268). To the Wilcoxes, *Howards End* is merely an ungainly and extraneous property onto which they hold only through their raw acquisitive instincts. That the house has been in the Howard family for generations, a traditional conception of landholding that Mary Butts reveres in her *Taverner Novels*, means little to Henry Wilcox. To his wife, by contrast, it is 'a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir' (*HE*, p. 107), and her 'one passion', the 'Holy of Holies' (*HE*, p. 95).

As in *The Longest Journey*, the transfer of property, whether the symbolic capital of literature or the physical inheritance of a venerable country estate is central. However, in the earlier novel Stephen Wonham is the spiritual avatar of Forster's Cambridge Hellenism, presaging a newly invigorated dynasty of patrilineal descent: a 'natural' and home-grown coterie of gentleman-farmers who will maintain the tilled fields surrounding Cadover in Wiltshire. *The Longest Journey* targets a suburban feminine sensibility, subjects it to severe scrutiny, and impugns it for vitiating an imaginary Anglo masculinity.

While the earlier novel inveighs against female governance and its unexamined defence of accepted social mores, *Howards End* illustrates how

⁹⁵ Harrison, *Themis*, p. xi.

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the country-house can only be redeemed by the cosmopolite Margaret Schlegel, who first catches a glimpse of her future habitation in rainy spring weather:

[t]ulips were a tray of jewels. She could not see the wych-elm tree, but a branch of the celebrated vine, studded with velvety knobs, had covered the porch. She was struck by the fertility of the soil; she had seldom been in a garden where the flowers looked so well, and even the weeds she was idly plucking out of the porch were intensely green. (HE, p. 200)

That Margaret should be the recipient of this hallowed site is surprising given that she features initially in the novel as a worldly urban subject. However, her perceptions of the city signal her growing discontent with the ‘melting-pot’ of modernity and the commodity focus of Christmas shoppers in London who seem to her ‘Satanic’ (HE, p. 66). Forster spells this out in the following passage. ‘[S]tarting from Howards End’, Margaret attempts to ‘visualise England’:

an unexpected love of the island awoke in her, connecting on this side with the joys of the flesh, on that with the inconceivable. Helen and her father had known this love, poor Leonard Bast was groping after it, but it had been hidden from Margaret till this afternoon. It had certainly come through the house and Miss Avery. Through them: the notion of ‘through’ persisted; her mind trembled towards a conclusion which only the unwise have put into words. Then, veering back to warmth, it dwelt on ruddy bricks, flowering plum trees, and all the tangible joys of spring. (HE, pp. 204-205)

Margaret’s ‘spring’ awakening is to an England whose mystical essence imbues the old house (‘ruddy bricks’) and its stalwart servitor, Miss Avery, who belongs to the adjoining farm and reflects the ‘natural’ vigour of the wych-elm:

It was neither warrior, nor lover, nor god; in none of these roles do the English excel. It was a comrade, bending over the house, strength and adventure in its roots, but in its utmost fingers tenderness, and the girth, that a dozen men could not have spanned, became in the end evanescent, till pale bud clusters seemed to float in the air. It was a comrade. House and tree transcended any simile of sex [...] to compare either to man, to woman, always dwarfed the vision. Yet they kept within limits of the human. Their message was not of eternity, but of hope on this side of the grave. As she stood in the one, gazing at the other, truer relationships had gleamed. (HE, p. 206)

Several romantic expectations are mischievously debunked in the depiction of the tree, including the traditional heroic identities implied by ‘warrior’, ‘lover’ and ‘god’. Despite the progression from substantial earth-bound physicality to ‘evanescent’ spiritual delicacy that it embodies, it never blurs into a transcendent vista or becomes unfathomably remote from the ‘limits of the human’. Everything denotes the glaring insufficiency of the

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conventional categories that language depends upon to order and calibrate the phenomenal external world around *Howards End*, including those terms derived from chivalric romance, metaphysical enquiry and immovable gender divisions. Even though the tree is extremely old and evokes primitive mythology – the talismanic pigs' teeth embedded in the bark – the description of it points the way to an alternative and oblique anthropological discourse far beyond the grasp of Rickie Elliot's hackneyed brand of Cambridge Hellenism in *The Longest Journey*. Margaret shrinks from any intuitive apprehension of the outermost parameters of 'the unseen', just as Ruth Wilcox registers how her own relationship to the ancestral past entails that 'one doesn't ask plain questions. There aren't such things' (*HE*, p. 36).

All vistas close in the unseen – no one doubts it – but Helen closed them rather too quickly for her taste. At every turn of speech one was confronted with reality and the absolute. Perhaps Margaret grew too old for metaphysics, perhaps Henry was weaning her from them, but she felt there was something a little unbalanced in the mind that so readily shreds the visible. (*HE*, p. 195)

In her essay on 'Uses of the Supernatural in English Fiction', Mary Butts chastises those writers 'who have *a theory of the unseen* and set out to insist on it' (my emphasis). She does not include Forster in this category: she regards him as one of 'special sensibility, curiosity and faith [...] indifferent to any ultimate distinction between pagan and Christian supernatural values'.⁹⁶

Within the larger question of inheritance that *Howards End* poses, Forster confronts the issue of spiritual continuity:

[i]s it credible that the possessions of the spirit can be bequeathed at all? Has the soul offspring? A wych-elm tree, a vine, a wisp of hay with dew on it – can passion for such things be transmitted where there is no bond of blood? (*HE*, p. 107)

Margaret is the spiritual 'daughter' of the Demeter figure Ruth Wilcox only in so far as she shares her atavistic devotion to, and nuanced appreciation of, the house, but she never inhabits the oracular role shared by Mrs Wilcox and Miss Avery, characters 'wholly in accord with the symbolist elements of the novel'.⁹⁷ Just as modernity has brought seismic material changes in people's lives – new modes of transport and urbanisation auguring, according to Masterman 'the possible future of a society beyond measure complex, baffling and uncertain in its energies and aims'⁹⁸ – so, too, it has brought a

⁹⁶ Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies: Uses of the Supernatural in English Fiction', in *Ashe of Rings and Other Writings*, pp. 359, 361.

⁹⁷ Medalie, *E. M. Forster's Modernism*, p. 90.

⁹⁸ Masterman, *The Condition of England*, p. 248.

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pressing need for a renovated spirituality, a unique configuration in reply to what Helen articulates: 'the vague yet convincing plea that the Invisible lodges against the Visible' (*HE*, p. 237).

Forster's concerns here anticipate and resonate with those of Mary Butts, with whom he corresponded during the 1930s. His dread, infusing both *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*, surveying the suburbs as a cheerless 'row of semi-detached villas', is given increasingly shrill emphasis in Butts's two preservationist pamphlets, *Warning to Hikers* and *Traps for Unbelievers* (both published in 1932). Butts's fictional conception of 'the Grey Thing' may have been shaped by Forster's stark vision of inexorable suburban sprawl as 'the grey monotony that surrounds all cities' (*LJ*, p. 27). In *Warning to Hikers*, she personifies the Dorset countryside as female, using the language of female chastity and rape to contrast unhusbanded nature with the masculinised towns – what Forster's Rickie Elliot labels as 'excrescences, grey fluxions, where men, hurrying to find one another, have lost themselves' (*LJ*, p. 27).

Butts is both complicit with and scathing about those suburban interlopers (like Forster himself?) who eroticise Nature as a female which requires unswerving devotion, or what Frank Trentmann terms the revival of 'pantheism as a popular creed'.⁹⁹ Butts partitions her own staunch stewardship of Demeter's garden from the grubby intervention of town dwellers who, blithely unaware of the countryside's sacred status, perpetuate idolatry by deifying an artificial cult of 'the outdoors'. Forster is himself prone to that tendency scorned by Butts, as signalled by Rickie Elliot's blushes over his own wispy aesthetic 'follies' in *The Longest Journey*:

[y]ou see, a year or two ago I had a great idea of getting into touch with Nature, just as the Greeks were in touch; and seeing England so beautiful, I used to pretend that her trees and coppices and summer fields of parsley were alive. (*LJ*, p. 77)

Butts and Forster both strive to segregate this whimsical dilettante fad from the direct unflinching contemplation of Demeter's earth. Following *Howards End*'s narrative tactic in taking the 'moral temperature' of the nation, Butts's *Traps for Unbelievers* concludes that the English nation has suffered because it deems all religious experience as shameful, degraded or obscene. What is absent for Butts is the mystical comprehension of which Forster's Ruth Wilcox becomes the dignified exemplar.

Through Ruth Wilcox, Forster's narrator finesses an image of the goddess Demeter as mother not only of a spiritual daughter, but also of the grain and

⁹⁹ Frank Trentmann, 'Civilization and its Discontents: English Neo-Romanticism and the Transformation of Anti-Modernism in Twentieth-Century Western Culture', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994), 588.

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of the dead. She encompasses the three stages of Maiden, Mother, and Crone but also the life force within the plant itself. This continuity with an organic milieu, the narrator implies, is crucial for testing the depth and spiritual richness of the myth, its origins, and the textures of the pagan vision that engendered it. But however much he promotes the necessity of lowering the mental barriers created by the structures of modern consciousness, he himself is unwilling, or unable to complete this process. Jane Harrison avers:

[t]here is no greater bar to the realizing of mythology which is the first condition of its being understood, than our modern habit of clear analytic thought. The very terms we use are sharpened to an over-nice discrimination. The first necessity is that, by an effort of the sympathetic imagination, we should think back the 'many' we have so sharply and strenuously divided, into the haze of the primitive 'one'. Nor must we regard this haze of the early morning as a deleterious fog, as a sign of disorder, weakness, oscillation. It is not confusion or even synthesis; rather it is as it were a protoplasmic fullness and forcefulness not yet articulate into the diverse forms of its ultimate births. It may even happen, as in the case of the Olympian divinities, that articulation and discrimination sound the note of approaching decadence. (*PGR*, p. 164)

Harrison deplors the gradual assimilation of the old religion to the new and the severe devaluation of the earth-goddess in deference to the dominance of an archetypal masculine. But to dream a way back to the 'protoplasmic fullness' that infuses early pagan religion is still, according to Harrison, the first priority in approaching a clearer, more rewarding apprehension of mythic material. She advocates a consciousness that is diffuse, permeable, flowing with the transmutations, even the contradictions of the imagery. Contradiction and multiplicity may come closer to truth and wholeness than linear, logical thinking, and Ruth Wilcox is Forster's attempt to personify this conviction, outstripping Rickie Elliot's tortured perception of Demeter as merely 'a torn photograph' (*LJ*, p. 255).

This is apparent in the episode where Aunt Juley and her son Charles quarrel bitterly at 'Capping Families'. Ruth Wilcox intervenes, first defusing Charles's efforts to play the boorish inquisitor:

[s]he approached just as Helen's letter had described her, trailing noiselessly over the lawn, and there was actually a wisp of hay in her hands. She seemed to belong not to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it. One knew that she worshipped the past, and that the instinctive wisdom the past can alone bestow had descended upon her – that wisdom to which we give the clumsy name of aristocracy. High-born she might not be. But assuredly she cared about her ancestors, and let them help her. When she saw Charles angry, Paul frightened, and [Aunt Juley] in tears, she heard her ancestors say: "Separate those human beings who will hurt each other most. The rest can wait." (*HE*, p. 36)

Through no conscious striving, Ruth penetrates the Wilcox carapace, conveying to her husband and children that 'the house', her feelings for it, the

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value it possesses offer qualities that they should not raze in one of their fits of narrow, bloodless efficiency. The family somehow divines they are not to 'take advantage of her' (*HE*, p. 21), as Helen notes in her second letter to Margaret. Those who will benefit from Ruth Wilcox's domain and its unmatched crop of 'hay' are imaged as the denizens of a radiant retreat synonymous with luxuriant ease, foreshadowing that 'aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky' extolled in Forster's 1939 essay 'What I Believe'.¹⁰⁰ The farmhands who keep the ancestral estate fruitful and productive, making the property function by mowing the meadows into 'hay' for the livestock, are conveniently forgotten.

As with the protagonists in Mary Butts's fiction, Forster's 'aristocracy', the priestly protectors of Demeter's green world, are specified in terms of *being* rather than *action*, a protest against newly arrived moneyed and franchised classes. Without recourse to dogmatism or missionary zeal, Ruth Wilcox counsels a steady unselfishness and a mode of relating to the surroundings through reveries of belonging, untranslatable mysteries of animistic insight. Stan Smith avers that the symbol of the English countryside 'becomes in the end a [...] place of community [...] for those modern [individuals] who go nowhere'.¹⁰¹ Or as Butts terms it in *Death of Felicity Taverner*,

[l]ike others of our age, they had re-discovered [...] the still life [...] They knew that the twenty four hours of the day and night are a [...] continuous programme, whose hero is the sun and whose heroine is the moon. (*DFT*, p. 185)

Ruth Wilcox's instincts sharply contrast not only with her family's obtuseness, but also with Aunt Juley's smug self-regard and petty interference: '[s]he possessed to a remarkable degree the power of distorting the past, and before many days were over she had forgotten the part played by her own imprudence in the catastrophe' (*HE*, p. 23). It is a piquant irony that Forster introduces more symbols of 'the unseen' through this crassly unseeing person. On her train trip to the village where *Howards End* resides, 'a series of tiled and slated houses passed before [her] inattentive eyes, a series broken at one point by six Danish tumuli that stood shoulder to shoulder along the highroad, tombs of soldiers' (*HE*, p. 29). These earthworks, the 'Six Hills', acquire additional layers of anthropological import as the novel progresses, linking the landscape's eternal 'Now' with an immeasurable pre-Christian heritage. Margaret Schlegel responds to the Six Hills ('tombs of warriors, breasts of the spring' (*HE*, p. 301)) with instinctive admiration: '[b]eneath them she settled that soldiers of the best kind lay

¹⁰⁰ Forster, 'What I Believe', *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 74.

¹⁰¹ Stan Smith, *Edward Thomas* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 13.

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buried. She hated war and liked soldiers – it was one of her amiable inconsistencies' (*HE*, p. 199).

At the novel's crisis-point, Margaret sits on the 'glebe', the melancholy remnant of the old farmland: 'Henry's kind had filched most of it. She moved to the scrap opposite, wherein were the Six Hills' (*HE*, p. 324). Henry Wilcox dismisses the Six Hills with a passing remark: '[c]urious mounds [...] but in with you now; another time' (*HE*, p. 204). He is handing Margaret into his 'motor' and has no leisure for tourist speculations, but his 'another time' is a biting dramatic irony: he does not know that he is evoking what he himself so patently lacks, the sense that the modern 'restless civilisation' that appears to him the apex of all the ages is simply an ephemeral phase in the real life of Demeter's earth. For the Wilcoxes time is perpetually out of joint, but they are like Aunt Juley fatuously unaware of it, 'incapable of grouping the past' (*HE*, p. 259). Henry's 'mental states became obscure as soon as he had passed through them' (*HE*, p. 178).

When Henry confesses to Margaret that his family has been utterly vanquished, she 'drove her fingers through the grass. The hill beneath her moved as if it was alive' (*HE*, p. 324). Against the spoiled enterprise of a defeated Wilcox clan, the narrator signifies the renewing vitality of the pagan soil. This informs Margaret's entry, after years of strange delays, deferrals and frustrations, into Howards End. She is not consciously alert to the fact that she may be entering a sacred space, but is unaccountably affected by the landscape as she stands on the porch: 'How Helen would revel in such a notion! Charles dead, all people dead, nothing alive but houses and gardens. The obvious dead, the intangible alive, and – no connection at all between them! Margaret smiled' (*HE*, p. 200). Then the house opens itself up to her, though it had seemed locked to Henry, and she enters full of 'fancies' she does not grasp. The sibylline disembodied utterance of Miss Avery who 'knows everything' (*HE*, pp. 313-14) implies the interpenetration of Margaret and Ruth Wilcox. Through this image the vicissitudes of human bodily life reflect the energy of Nature's 'body' in animals and plants to be essentially, continually transforming.

VII

By the end of the novel, Margaret assumes the ritualistic role and verbal mannerisms associated with Ruth Wilcox, settling disputes with atavistic generosity rather than with her earlier Schlegel liberalism, which tends to victimise its legatees. On being praised for this by Helen, she says, sitting among the hay: '[t]hings that I can't phrase have helped me' (*HE*, p. 329). Margaret, like her spiritual earth-mother, learns to participate in the organic rhythms of a rustic milieu through the use of 'geographic' imagination: 'the

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imagination swells, spreads and deepens, until it becomes geographic and encircles England' (*HE*, p. 171). This atavistic intensity may rehabilitate England in a way far superior to the depredations of an 'Imperialist' venture (*HE*, p. 315):

[d]oes [England] belong to those who have moulded her and made her feared by other lands, or to those who have added nothing to her power, but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea, sailing as a ship of souls, with all the brave world's fleet accompanying her towards eternity? (*HE*, p. 178)

Even as these rapt rhetorical flourishes remind us of John of Gaunt's panegyric to 'the precious stone set in a silver sea' in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Forster's narrator senses that his soaring tribute cannot restore the earth-worshipper to an unsullied island idyll. He deliberately debunks the references to an archetypal English landscape with the bathetic half-sentence: 'Nor is suburbia absent' (*HE*, p. 170).

Unlike Mary Butts, whose imaginary Wessex in the *Taverner Novels* is effectively cleansed of suburban encroachments, Forster's narrator cannot invoke Hardy's country without ruefully recognising that the environment is only memorialised by a pastoralism rejoicing in 'being' as an unmediated essence, whose existence need not be justified or fully apprehended. His more mature, reflective, even resigned viewpoint finds it difficult to extol what are mere avenues of avoidance as a deeper actuality. *Howards End* is shaped by bitter knowledge that all autochthonic projects are contingent, culturally variable activities, a fact wholly at odds with, and injurious to, the narrator's urgent and sincere nostalgia for imperilled country rituals and the house, tree, and hay which concretises them. Brian May posits that 'Forsterian nationalism in *Howards End* is not an ironic performance but an imperial one'.¹⁰² Forster was certainly susceptible to unembarrassed sentimentality for his boyhood home Rooksnest – which partially inspired *Howards End* – though he was uneasy about the trifling parochialism inherent in local pride. Forster remarked much later, 'the English character is incomplete. No national character is complete. We have to look for some qualities in one part of the world and others in another'.¹⁰³ May's interpretation misses a caustic irony: the narrator's quirky patriotism becomes more self-undermining and less unabashed as the novel proceeds. Often wary of the values of 'Englishness' and reluctant to proclaim an easy adherence to national identity, the narrator is nevertheless drawn to his country's traditions and lore. Yet he retains the ability to revel in the

¹⁰² May, *The Modernist as Pragmatist: E. M. Forster and the Fate of Liberalism* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1996), p. 15.

¹⁰³ Forster, 'Notes on the English Character' (1926), in *Abinger Harvest*, pp. 14-15.

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transparent artifice of his poetic processes at work, parading and parodying his own mounting rhetorical gusto as he surveys a southern landscape of gently rolling farmland and stately manors:

[t]here was a long silence, during which the tide returned into Poole Harbour. 'One would lose something', murmured Helen, apparently to herself. The water crept over the mud-flats towards the gorse and the blackened heather. Branksea Island lost its immense foreshores, and became a sombre episode of trees. Frome was forced inwards towards Dorchester, Stour against Wimbourne, Avon towards Salisbury, and over the immense displacement the sun presided, leading it to triumph ere he sank to rest. England was alive, throbbing through all her estuaries, crying for joy through the mouths of all her gulls, and the north wind, with contrary motion, blew stronger against her rising seas. (*HE*, p. 178)

Hardy's Wessex had become in Forster's lifetime an aestheticised Arcadia, and in explicit recognition of this stylisation the narrator playfully deploys the archaic 'ere'. Margaret Schlegel feels that she has lost 'the sense of space' (*HE*, p. 145) – the soil as a presumably absolute principle of local attachment and belonging. But as the novel makes clear through its withering depiction of motorcar journeys, the meaning of space, even the fecund expanse of Wessex, is a fragile, contested and erratic social and historical construct. However much Margaret wishes to salvage the traditional pieties of place that are casually effaced by the agents of urban, cosmopolitan haste, the narrator articulates that 'the sense of space' is not a given but an arena of conflicting cultural resonances, manufactured by social investments of belief. Thus the narrator's knowingly purple prose summons up the energies that could infuse Hardy's birthplace with patriotic sentiment and atavistic significance, while laying them bare for sober inspection through the very extravagance of his rhetoric.

Because this archly grandiloquent passage seems so evacuated of tangible meaning, it becomes impossible to accept the narrator's depiction of Miss Avery as the proud recipient of this geographic imagination, affording multiplied consciousness to the elect. The country people believe Miss Avery possesses 'prophetic powers', and she foretells the futures of all the key characters and of Howards End. She becomes the *genius loci* of this site, although the male Wilcoxes obdurately persist in treating her as a dull-witted and irksome 'charwoman' (*HE*, p. 261). Miss Avery is not only sibylline, but personifies Forster's 'folk wisdom' that is central to his delineation of Ruth Wilcox's garden as a totalising and affective symbol of national culture.

Without telling us that Ruth Wilcox has died or even that she was seriously ill – indeed the immediately preceding chapter has her 'fit as a fiddle' by her own account (*HE*, p. 96) – Forster opens chapter eleven with '[t]he funeral was over'. For a young woodcutter who pollards elms while the funeral takes place beneath him, the burial is ritual as sensual experience, not

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a mock-mummery. Through the woodcutter Forster underscores how Harrison's theory of autochthony solidifies the links between fatalism and fertility, death and rebirth:

[t]he young wood-cutter stayed a little longer, poised above the silence and swaying rhythmically. At last the bough fell beneath his saw. With a grunt, he descended, his thoughts dwelling no longer on death, but on love, for he was mating. He stopped as he passed the new grave; a sheaf of tawny chrysanthemums had caught his eye. 'They didn't ought to have coloured flowers at burials', he reflected. Trudging on a few steps, he stopped again, looked furtively at the dusk, turned back, wrenched a chrysanthemum from the sheaf, and hid it in his pocket. (*HE*, p. 98)

Forster's conception of the young woodcutter as one of Demeter's people, a figure of primal vigour is problematic, not just for its adherence to 'the widespread cult of the peasant',¹⁰⁴ but because Forster's autochthonic thinking blurs into Tory apologetics, favouring a feudal model in which the stalwart small cultivator becomes the key symbol. The Wilcoxes, self-righteous arrivistes in the most aggressive form, stand for an exploitative Whiggery: pursuing commercial gain at whatever cost to the land, venerating social appearances and the strict legal definition of property rights. By contrast, the woodcutter is the potential heir to a magisterial 'yeoman' tradition (*HE*, p. 315) already established through Stephen Wonham in *The Longest Journey*:

[in the country] men had been up since dawn. Their hours were ruled, not by a London office, but by the movements of the crops and the sun [...] Clumsily they carry forward the torch of the sun, until such time as the nation sees fit to take it up. (*HE*, p. 314)

In *Howards End* communion with the soil depends on a refurbished version of English nativism, which could easily slide into the xenophobic emnity infusing Butts's *Taverner Novels* – exclusionary and paranoid with regard to region, class, race, and sexuality. What the *Taverner Novels* often lack is the quirkily ironic detachment with which Forster's narrator regards his own patriotic effusions: he is lyrical about time-hallowed rural conventions while signalling their grave flaws and mannered artificiality, since there is always lack, absence or incompleteness in any nation's view of its own heritage. Thus he prevents John Bull from turning into the blustering bully and bigot that amalgamates perspectives, curbs otherness, and compels unity out of distinctive differences in Butts's fiction. Forster's narrator wishes to further a nourishing, rather than a suffocating notion of nativism, against the glow of supposed energy concealing real decay that London

¹⁰⁴ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* (London: Faber, 1992), p. 36.

epitomises.¹⁰⁵ In the closing chapters Forster connotes that Demeter's 'earth',¹⁰⁶ with its meadows teeming with richly overgrown flowers, grasses, trees, and bushes, cannot withstand the 'red rust' (*HE*, p. 329) from which Leonard Bast and his consort Jacky emerge: suburban smog that obscures edges and dims outlines, 'creeping' inexorably closer to this unkempt natural profusion.

Though Butts's fiction is replete with apocalyptic foreboding, what unnerves her most is the force of devolution and mediocrity typified by Leonard Bast's suburban insurance clerk who is denied ready access to the cultural capital enjoyed by the privileged class.¹⁰⁷ As John Carey remarks, '[h]ostility to the suburbs as ecologically destructive quickly fused with contempt for those who lived in them'.¹⁰⁸ Butts evinces a general preservationist suspicion of the capacity of upwardly mobile and intrusively antagonistic suburbanites to boost their social cachet and infiltrate a rustic domain already smeared by the centrifugal movement of the metropole's moribund matter onwards and outwards.¹⁰⁹ In a similar vein, *Howards End* portrays the dirty emissions from traffic infecting the lungs of the 'lower orders'. To Butts these are the new barbarians of Bast's urban workforce, who combine social declension with grossly misplaced aspiration, what Forster terms the dread 'angel of Democracy' (*HE*, p. 58) becoming in Butts's reaction to class miscibility the democratic 'enemy'.¹¹⁰

Forster's stuttering condescension towards Bast (his surname connotes an illegitimate wastrel child of suburban sprawl) signifies that he himself is not unsympathetic to Butts's siege mentality. His narrator's edgy portrait of the

¹⁰⁵ As Herbert Samuel noted in 1902, '[t]he English nation is becoming more and more a people of dwellers in cities. And this change is widely recognised to be full of danger to the national future'. See Samuel, *Liberalism: An Attempt to State the Principles and Proposals of Contemporary Liberalism in England* (London: Richards, 1902), p. 103.

¹⁰⁶ See Leslie White, 'Vital Disconnection in *Howards End*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 51 (2005), 43-63.

¹⁰⁷ See Mary Pinkerton, 'Ambiguous Connections: Leonard Bast's Role in *Howards End*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 31 (1985), 236-46.

¹⁰⁸ Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁰⁹ See Harvey Taylor, *A Claim on the Countryside: A History of the British Outdoor Movement* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997), pp. 226-72; Stephen G. Jones, *Workers at Play: A Social and Economic History of Leisure 1918-1939* (London: Routledge, 1986). Country leisure was both welcomed by preservationists and diagnosed as an act of cultural trespass whenever the proletariat attempted unauthorised encroachment. See David Matliss, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), p. 67; Michael Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American Images of Landscape* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 179-82.

¹¹⁰ Butts's perspective invites comparison with Forster's belief, articulated in the *Commonplace Book*, that the money-based system favoured by suburbanites has disrupted reliable signs of class status: '[m]oney blurs everything now, takes the edge off every character. "I can't afford" alternating with "I'm in balance" or "reckless" (generous). The produce of the world has become dimmer than the channel down which it slides to us'. See Forster, *Commonplace Book*, p. 91.

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clerk, unhappily toiling away in the drabest echelons of London's banking sector, disguises both a deep evolutionary and eugenic disillusionment:

[Bast] knew that he was poor, and would admit it [...] he was inferior to most rich people, there is not the least doubt of it. He was not as courteous as the average rich man, nor as intelligent, nor as healthy, nor as lovable. His mind and his body had been alike underfed, because he was poor. (*HE*, p. 58)

In *Traps for Unbelievers* Butts enjoins a new standpoint towards an English countryside charged with metaphysical potential; but the agents of this rekindled spiritual and spatial acuity must sedulously guard England's national borders and especially its porous class boundaries. Forster's stress on the coming fruitfulness of a 'crop of hay' at Howards End lacks conviction because in this abundantly fecund site nobody seems marred by the mindless, mechanical lower-middle class 'labour' to which Bast is inured. He will never attain the perspicuity that Margaret and Helen idealistically ascribe to him. He is 'a dispensable condition, as likely a figure for surplus as the throwaway furnishings of his rented flat'.¹¹¹ *Howards End* unwittingly reproduces Richard Jefferies's withdrawal towards a personalised Eden in *The Story of My Heart* (1883): 'I hope succeeding generations will be able to be idle'.¹¹²

Long before surveying Howards End, Margaret says, 'I quite expect to end my life caring most for a place' (*HE*, p. 137), a sense of proportionate and insular 'space' that augurs the muted provincialism of Forster's essay 'My Wood' (1926), written shortly after the publication of *A Passage to India*.¹¹³ This accords with Masterman's 1911 judgement that those who do not find the 'riotous life' of the modern moment congenial will 'seek satisfaction in quietness and common things – the untroubled horizon, the secure possession of the heart of humanity'.¹¹⁴ The ancestral home is a time capsule of the 'real' agrarian England imperfectly sealed against the city's discontinuous blur of hurry and the Wilcoxes, whose sense of unsentimental proprietorship oddly mingles with profoundly placeless instincts.

The cacophonous intrusion of the motorcar, and its journeys which induce only sickly disorientation, is exploited metaphorically in a passage contrasting Ruth Wilcox's cheery acceptance of seasonal mutability with the mercurial dartings of a smart set (among whom is a Miss Quested). 'Clever talk alarmed [Mrs Wilcox], and withered her delicate imaginings; it was the

¹¹¹ Henry S. Turner, 'Empires of Objects: Accumulation and Entropy in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 46 (2000), 333.

¹¹² Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart* (London: Eyre, 1949), p. 143.

¹¹³ Forster purchased his wood with the royalties from *Passage to India*, a fact that literalises his reinvestment in English territory.

¹¹⁴ Masterman, *The Condition of England*, p. 184.

social counterpart of a motor-car, all jerks, and she was a wisp of hay, a flower' (*HE*, p. 84). She says to Margaret, '[y]ou younger people move so quickly that it dazes me' (*HE*, p. 87). Margaret feels this as a stinging rebuke from a spiritual authority she cannot fully comprehend yet, 'a personality that transcended their own and dwarfed their activities' (*HE*, p. 86). As the narrator explains, 'the earth is explicable – from her we came, and we must return to her' (*HE*, p. 116). Ruth Wilcox's transcendence lies of course in her merger with the earth and Demeter's people beneath it, literally so at her funeral, after which even her spouse – the epitome of hard-nosed commercial calculation – receives a flicker of insight: 'Ruth knew no more of worldly wickedness and wisdom than did the flowers in her garden, or the grass in her field' (*HE*, p. 99).

The entire framework of hushed stillness in rural houses and motion sickness in cars is sexually polarised, so that the struggle between Schlegels and Wilcoxes is really between atavistically attuned females who look after 'survivals' (*HE*, p. 329), and crassly materialist males. However, the unique matrilineal 'spirit' of *Howards End* is partially reliant upon Henry Wilcox's fortune that drains the fields, thins out the brush, rebuilds the kitchen, and keeps the property from falling down. The narrator remarks, '[a]re the sexes really races, each with its own code of mortality, and their mutual love a mere device of Nature's to keep things going?' (*HE*, p. 238) This thought occurs to Margaret, and it recurs later in unanswerable form when she shuts herself up in *Howards End* with her fugitive and pregnant sister: '[a] new feeling came over her; she was fighting for women against men. She did not care about rights, but if men came into *Howards End*, it should be over her body' (*HE*, p. 283). The battle for stewardship of Demeter's 'sacred centre' (*HE*, p. 325), which seemed between families, is unmasked as one between the sexes. The rustic retreat is not to be the vulgar legalistic inheritance of a patriarchal clan based on consanguinity and primogeniture, but a safe-house for refugee women 'who care for the earth' (*HE*, p. 116), and their nameless offspring – evoking an almost Burkean vision of England as a world small, fruitful and clean.

The sexual imperative is vital to 'the unseen' component in *Howards End*: at the core of human existence, as fertility is for tribal communities. Forster manipulates his connective plotting so that Helen Schlegel's illegitimate son by Leonard Bast shall receive the house after his aunt's death.¹¹⁵ On a cursory analysis it seems that the 'ownership' of England will pass to the unorthodox affiliation between the aesthetically alert, impulsively socialist young woman and the earnestly striving though hapless lower

¹¹⁵ See E. Kim Stone, 'Recovering the Lone Mother: *Howards End* as Aesthetic Anodyne', *Camera Obscura*, 55 (2004), 43-75.

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middle-class man – hinting that the routine institutional model of the family may be rejuvenated to promote equality and individuality within the domestic circle.¹¹⁶ Forster undercuts mollifying nostalgic gloss and an ostensibly harmonious formal-thematic resolution with a more sobering theory. The novel moves ineluctably towards a conception of the country nook as a precariously positioned sanctuary or redoubt for a priestly female in worried flight from, rather than securely immersed in, an England whose potential for cultural renewal is undecided at the end.¹¹⁷ There are modest victories of course: the concentrated grasp of Wilcox pragmatism has been irretrievably weakened and Margaret is restored to an estate she should have had upon Ruth Wilcox's death. Yet Forster subverts the seeming treacly tranquillity by associating the estate with rage and violent disturbance – the untimely death of Leonard Bast.

The possibility of evolutionary and eugenic recovery through the child is offset by the final image of *Howards End* itself not as a well-fortified haven for 'Demeter's people' but as a brittle shelter for the shattered remnants of a conservative capitalist nuclear clan: an illicit child, an unwed mother (Helen Schlegel), a murdered father (Bast is not permitted to survive given his defective proletarian DNA), a humiliated, acquiescent husband almost on his deathbed (Henry Wilcox), and a wife who flatly refuses to bear offspring (Margaret Schlegel). This is some way from Forster visualising a more charitable, open, and inclusive family in which each member, rather than being locked into his or her own irreducible separateness, inherits a fresh passion for the past, becoming equally energised by it.¹¹⁸

Margaret herself disengages from her earlier Schlegelian ethos – moderate, caring, visionary, and progressive – and begins to resemble a dogmatically self-righteous and bossy *materfamilias*, autocratically 'straightening' out life's confusing tangles (*HE*, p. 329), though is 'unable to forgive' (*HE*, p. 324). The only available Wilcox heir, Paul, has fled England for empire.¹¹⁹ At the close Margaret thinks, '[s]he, who had never expected to

¹¹⁶ This perception may have been shaped by Masterman's lament that the English countryside was falling into the hands of a pernicious plutocracy: '[i]n many of the home counties [...] the bulk of the older estates have passed into the hands of the owners of the 'new wealth', the Plutocracy which looks for its consummation in ownership of a portion of the land of England'. Masterman, *The Condition of England*, p. 171.

¹¹⁷ See Elizabeth Outka, 'Buying Time: *Howards End* and Commodified Nostalgia', *Novel*, 36 (2003), 330-50.

¹¹⁸ For a detailed consideration of this question see Jeane N. Olson, 'E. M. Forster's Prophetic Vision of the Modern Family in *Howards End*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 35 (1993), 347-62.

¹¹⁹ Paul Wilcox departs for Nigeria to take control of his family's interests in the Imperial and West African Rubber Company there. Britain completed its conquest of Nigeria in 1903, and by 1910, when the novel is set, was busily engaged in exploiting the land for its natural resources.

conquer anyone, had charged straight through these Wilcoxes and broken up their lives' (HE, p. 331). This connotes that the crusading zeal to harmonise and unify is not just coercive, unfortunate and unrealistic, but also wreaks destruction. Margaret, however well-meaning, cannot properly assume Ruth Wilcox's mantle of benignant earth-mother, since she is a figure whose ardent need to forge consensus by battling privilege and partisanship only deepens difference and prolongs exclusion; smothering, rather than magnifying the possibilities of relatedness.

Judith Wiessman argues that in the mythical site of Howards End is 'the beginning of a radical new economic order that can subvert the Wilcoxes and their empire'.¹²⁰ However, there is no transcendental language of social mediation or all-encompassing synthesis at Howards End: Margaret presides over an untraditional community, though it upholds orthodox class distinctions while seeming a solution of sorts to the distance, deference, and callous meddling maintained by the Wilcoxes. The only working males are the gardener and the baby-sitter, the service providers for this supposedly more expansive, biddable family model dedicated to unforced, un-mercenary social relations. Like Mary Butts's fiction, *Howards End* is obsessed with the transformative possibilities of matrilineal succession to refresh the common view of the family as an immutable institution, whose social, economic, and political health tends to outweigh in importance the personal aspirations of individual members. Forster though is far less confident that a mystical female can reclaim the holy habitation and disseminate innovative definitions of traditional values such as work, property, and community. The estate has been deeded from corporate capitalist to affluent highbrow and, in the future, will fall into the hands of a lowly clerk's son. The eponymous estate ultimately functions as what Michel Foucault terms a 'heterotopia' – a sacred site which veils, without sufficiently resolving, deep-seated cultural anxieties about the nation, the land, and the past.¹²¹

Howards End exploits a clash between the mystificatory account of the 'natural/rooted' country house and the graceless actuality of commercial chicanery, city banking, insurance, and real estate, only to elide and hide its unpalatable implications. The novel grapples with the heavy financial and human costs of producing an Anglo-Saxon version of Demeter's holy shrine,

¹²⁰ Judith Wiessman, 'Howards End: Gasoline and Goddesses', in *Howards End*, ed. by Alistair M. Duckworth (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), p. 444.

¹²¹ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. by Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 355. *Heterotopia* is the term Foucault coins for a cultural site that has not yet been de-sanctified (p. 352). In such locales as churches, cemeteries, war memorials, and historic buildings, the sacred nature of these heterotopic spaces masks the power relations at work within them by reconfiguring the past in the heterotopia and either concealing the present or relegating it to the margins.

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its meticulous construction, its fantasy of purification, and the obsessive yearning to clinch this illusion, a yearning Forster undoubtedly shares. This contrasts with H. G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay*, which appeared the previous year and dispenses with Forster's cloudy generalities that borrow from Masterman's 1902 apocalyptic visions of the city as 'a mammoth of gigantic and unknown possibility'.

I didn't like those young countrymen, and I'm no believer in the English countryside under the Bladesover system as a breeding-ground for honourable men. One hears a frightful lot of nonsense about the Rural Exodus and the degeneration wrought by town life upon our population. To my mind, the English townsman even in the slums is infinitely better spiritually, more courageous, more imaginative and cleaner, than his agricultural cousin.¹²²

Wells's reference to the 'frightful lot of nonsense' registers a tension between Forster's fabular and supernatural concerns and the conventions of the English realist text. Michael Levenson points out that '[l]iberalism and symbolism, both unwieldy terms, become more unwieldy when brought together', adding that they belong to 'such different orders of description and such different strains of modernity'.¹²³ But Forster intends the two literary modes to chafe against each other, as he ranges dialectically over broad metaphysical and socio-political priorities. *Howards End* enacts a bracing but inevitably doomed venture to 'house' antithetical dispositions. In a 1910 letter to Arthur Benson, Forster claims:

the book is poetical rather than philosophical. This sounds arrogant, but one's confused little mind is visited by impulses of beauty, whereas systematic thought can only come to the mind that is both strong and orderly [...] though the supernatural element in the book is not supposed to be 'compulsory', I'm afraid that only those readers who 'take' it, will get through with any ease.¹²⁴

Howards End destabilises the 'strong and orderly' tenets of Edwardian realism, pushing instead 'the supernatural element' personified by Ruth Wilcox. That the conflict between realistic and 'supernatural' modes, seen and unseen, remains largely unresolved in the narrative fabric, may explain why the Demeter-Persephone myth cannot be 'accommodated' within the more astringent milieu of *A Passage to India* (1924):

In Europe life retreats out of the cold, and exquisite fireside myths have resulted – Balder, Persephone – but here the retreat is from the source of life, the treacherous sun,

¹²² H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 59-60.

¹²³ Michael H. Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 78.

¹²⁴ *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. by Lago and Furbank, I, p. 119.

E. M. Forster and Demeter's English Garden

and no poetry adorns it, because disillusionment cannot be beautiful. Men yearn for poetry though they may not confess it; they desire that joy shall be graceful, and sorrow august, and infinity have a form, and India fails to accommodate them.¹²⁵

Forster evinces in *A Passage to India* that the Persephone story disintegrates under the weight of a concept of the subcontinent whose multitudes of races, creeds, and hierarchies are too 'muddled' and mysterious to allow them to be encompassed or even adequately apprehended by the old Mediterranean gods of Forster's Western heritage. The Indian 'earth' is a hinterland of inaccessible resonance, a terrain that precedes the mythical potencies invested in it, and supplies a stinging rebuke to those who defend moral absolutes in a relativistic world of contingent and incompatible truths. 'The high places of Dravidia have been land since land began [...] They are older than anything in the world, [they are] flesh of the sun's flesh'. As such 'they are older than all spirit' (*PI*, pp. 127-28).

How can the mind take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile. The important towns they build are only retreats, their quarrels the malaise of men who cannot find their way home. (*PI*, p. 128)

It is revealing how few metaphors there are for the animate earth in *A Passage to India*, when compared to *Howards End*. Autochthony can be traced in India, as in the cult of 'Esmis Es Moor' that springs up at her death. Yet by insisting on the Demeter-Persephone story as if it were an 'exquisite fireside' myth, Forster signals a great deal about his own abiding attitude to classical divinities in previous novels: one that never entirely exorcises the 'dainty' and delicate imprint of Philip Herriton's verbal mannerisms in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. As Harrison avows, Greek religion, for all its superficial repose and quietude, has within it and beneath it a 'strange fierce loveliness that lurks in rites of ignorance and fear, rites stark and desperate and non-moral' (*PGR*, p. 57).

VIII

Howards End taps the 'substratum of religious conceptions, at once more primitive and more permanent' (*PGR*, p. vii) that Jane Harrison underlines in the *Prolegomena*. However, Forster's project only serves to confirm his withdrawal to an imaginary secessionist realm that produces both benefits for Demeter's spiritual children, as well as deficiencies and exclusions. In his essay on W. H. Auden's *The Enchafèd Flood*, Forster refers to 'the comfort

¹²⁵ E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, ed. by Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), pp. 214-15. Hereafter referred to as *PI*.

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of the non-human, the relief, when we look up at the stars, of realising that they are uninhabitable'.¹²⁶ But his writing is so replete with qualms, unwilling concessions, and nagging doubts that his narrators cannot portray the 'non-human' or 'the inconceivable' (*HE*, p. 202) as a credible ideal of encompassing vibrancy, impacting upon, and irradiating, ordinary lives. Forster's coy self-consciousness of tone results in his vouchsafing definitive wisdom even as he tacitly questions it by exposing its partiality. His teasing attempts to mediate oppositions and establish social wholes or community only illustrate more forcefully the ineluctability of division. Forster, in 'The Beauty of Life' (1911), seems to concede this point by signifying that 'the modern mind [...] can never recall joy on a large scale – the joy of the gods', gathering only 'Beauty in scraps', the half-remembered fragments of a besieged pastoralism.¹²⁷ Similarly, what was once closely and vitally associated in ancient Greek society according to Lowes Dickinson in 1904 – the ideal 'originally related to the real' – denoting the stately 'impulse to reconcile divergent elements',¹²⁸ is no longer attainable within Forster's illustration of modern malaise. In an essay paying warm tribute to George Orwell's desire to do more than 'ameliorate a world which is bound to be unhappy', Forster concludes:

[w]e part company with a man who has been determined to see what he can of this contradictory and disquieting world and to follow its implications into the unseen – or anyhow to follow them around the corner.¹²⁹

Forster cannot wholeheartedly 'follow' the 'implications' of the Demeter-Persephone myth into the 'unseen' and so, instead of confronting 'this contradictory and disquieting world', he circulates ceaselessly around it, succumbing to elegiac yearning for those markers of halcyon, pre-industrial bliss, 'the periods of quiet [...] essential to true growth' (*HE*, p. 89). Masterman, in his unsigned 1908 review of *A Room with a View*, lauded Forster's receptivity to 'the revelation of the hidden life' in this 'strange region of modern things'.¹³⁰ This 'revelation' of elemental, primitive or visionary splendour evinces a need to inscribe onto a rustic locale a sense of

¹²⁶ Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 262.

¹²⁷ In this essay Forster records: '[h]ere then is what one may call the irreducible minimum, the inalienable dowry of humanity: Beauty in scraps. It may seem a little thing after the comprehensive ecstasies of Whitman, but it is certain; it is for all men in all times, and we couldn't avoid it even if we wanted to'. See Forster, 'The Beauty of Life', in *Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings*, ed. by George H. Thomson (New York: Liveright, 1971), pp. 171-72, 143.

¹²⁸ Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, *The Greek View of Life* (London: Methuen, 1904), pp. 228, 229.

¹²⁹ Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 61.

¹³⁰ Masterman in *E. M. Forster: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Gardner, p. 115.

temporal continuity that paradoxically forecloses the future and rejects the possibility of productive growth. What compromises the durability and authenticity of Forster's revelation is the biting 'regret' which continues to haunt him twenty years after the publication of *Howards End*. In a *Commonplace Book* entry entitled 'Collapsing Countryside 27-3-30', he exclaims: '[w]hile I sat in rooms or in foreign trains and steamers the England I loved has crumbled. I wish I did not regret her'.¹³¹ D. H. Lawrence refuses to succumb to this self-reproach and doleful displacement in *The Lost Girl*, and thus draws closer to a harsher atavistic vision described by Harrison, one that embraces 'ideas of evil [...] ignored or suppressed by Homer' (*PGR*, p. vii). Although attracted by a romantic theory of inspiration – invoking the artist who 'dips a bucket' into the 'lower personality',¹³² – Forster was not prepared to champion unequivocally the savage dark gods embedded in that *lower* self.

Lawrence, as the next chapter demonstrates, pursues the oblique, oracular, and dislocating psychological meanings that attach to the unseen, gazing into and beyond those 'rites of the underlying stratum' (*PGR*, p. ix). Forster's fascination for these rites is diluted by the pastoral genre's association with 'those less agitating days of the past, when the earth seemed solid and the stars fixed, and the discoveries of science were made slowly, slowly'.¹³³ Forster and Lawrence grapple with the dilemma of being a modern writer while at the same time spurning those facets of modernism which either simplified the problem of 'wholeness' by detaching art from the sharp impact of felt experience (so that unity in art is a formal precept only) or glorified, with Futurist fervour, the scrappy and amorphous quality of contemporary existence. Whereas Forster's fiction resigns itself to the ebbing away of a putative organic integrity, Lawrence takes Demeter-Persephone, expressed by turns as immersion, reversion, and as descent, to render a wellspring of renewed control, a process accompanied by augmented awareness, pain, perplexity and hope. He employs the gods as an intricate framework for a new kind of mythic narrative that surpasses what Forster terms in his essay 'Pessimism in Literature' the 'discomfort and misery that lie so frequently beneath the smiling surface of things'.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Forster, *Commonplace Book*, p. 58.

¹³² Forster, 'Anonymity: An Enquiry' (1925), in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, pp. 82-83.

¹³³ Forster, 'Art for Art's Sake', in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 92.

¹³⁴ Forster, 'Pessimism in Literature', in *Albergo Empedocle*, p. 142.

Chapter 6

Lawrence's Underworld

I

You promised to send me violets – have you forgot?
White ones and blue ones from under the orchard
Hedge?
You said you would be my Persephone
You would not
Persephone has passed through the town, fasten-
-ing her girdle-knot.¹

Until recently, many major studies of Lawrence's fiction had passed over *The Lost Girl* (1920) in faintly embarrassed silence.² This unmerited and unfortunate neglect is all the more startling given the intellectual daring with which Lawrence manipulates the Demeter-Persephone myth as a partially concealed pattern shaping his narrative into a ritual sequence.³ Lawrence's

¹ D. H. Lawrence, Manuscript I version of 'The Almond-Tress'. Quoted in Gail Porter Mandell, *The Phoenix Paradox: A Study of Renewal Through Change in the 'Collected Poems' and 'Last Poems' of D. H. Lawrence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 28.

² As Ann L. Ardis notes, '*The Lost Girl* has had the dubious distinction of being the lost text in Lawrence's canon, even though it is the only book for which Lawrence received a major award during his lifetime'. See *Modernism and Cultural Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 80. See also Ardis, 'Delimiting Modernism and the Literary Field: D. H. Lawrence and *The Lost Girl*' in *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel, 1900-30*, ed. by Lynne Hapgood and Nancy L. Paxton (London: Macmillan, 2000). The consensus of opinion until the 1980s had been that *The Lost Girl* ranks among Lawrence's least successful fiction. See *D. H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by R. P. Draper (New York, 1970). In letters to friends, Lawrence seems at times excited about writing *The Lost Girl*. In general, he stressed competence of writing and financial potential through sales to 'the Meredith public' rather than art or theory. Even though *The Lost Girl* is the least acclaimed of Lawrence's texts today, it won the James Tate Black prize of 100 pounds in 1921. See also M. Elizabeth Sargent, '*The Lost Girl*: Re-appraising the Post-War Lawrence on Women's Will and Ways of Knowing', in *D. H. Lawrence in Italy and England*, ed. by George Donaldson and Mara Kalnins (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 176-192.

³ For more sympathetic and incisive accounts of *The Lost Girl* and its mythical references see Virginia Hyde, "'Lost Girls': D. H. Lawrence's Versions of Persephone", in *Images of Persephone: The Persephone Myth in Western Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth T. Hayes (Florida: University of Florida Press, 1992), pp. 99-119; Donovan, *After the Fall*; Anja Viinikka, *From Persephone to Pan: D. H. Lawrence's Mythopoeic Vision of the Integrated Personality* (Turku,

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sources for the myth range from the cool Pre-Raphaelite seductress in D. G. Rossetti's *Proserpine* to seminal turn-of-the-century studies of comparative religion by Frazer, Harrison and Gilbert Murray. Lawrence's first explicit references to the works of the 'Cambridge School' date from 1913.⁴ 'When you can', Lawrence wrote to a friend in 1913, 'lend me books about Greek religions and rise of Greek Drama, or Egyptian influences – or things like that – I love them'.⁵ In a letter to Bertrand Russell on 8 December 1915, Lawrence remarked that he had been looking at both Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890) and *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910).⁶

Lawrence's preoccupation with the burgeoning science of anthropology confirmed and enlarged many of his own independent intuitions. His responsiveness to this subject was not arbitrary or unique; rather it revelled in the contemporary interest generated not only by the mammoth third edition of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, but also by publications specifically on Greek religion and drama coming from the Cambridge Ritualists or those reacting to them with corrective theories.⁷ In 1916, Lawrence read Gilbert Murray and

Finland: Turun Yliopisto Julkaisuja, 1988); Jill Franks, 'Myth and Biography in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *The Lost Girl*', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 30 (2001), 29-44.

⁴ D. H. Lawrence, *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, p. 234. Jane Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* was published in the popular Home University Library in 1913. Lawrence read it a few months before his acquaintance with H. D. began, and he was strongly taken with its insight 'to see art coming out of religious yearning' (*Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, pp. 90, 114). Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* begins with a description of an Athenian theatregoer and describes the Athenian drama in its religious function (pp. 10-15). Lawrence responded positively to Harrison's thesis that ritual may be understood as a 'bridge' between life and art. (pp. 205-7). These emphases may have emerged from Gilbert Murray's *Euripides and His Age* (1913), which shares Harrison's theories about Greek theatre. Murray wrote a widely read history of Greek literature (1897) and several very popular studies propounding models of Greek religion conceived in affiliation with Harrison: his introduction to *Euripides* (1902), translations with notes of the *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae*; *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (1912); and *Euripides and His Age* (1913), in the Home University Library series.

⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, p. 114.

⁶ Unfortunately, Lawrence does not give any hint as to which of the three possible and, on points, quite different editions of *The Golden Bough* he was reading.

⁷ The twelve-volume third edition of *The Golden Bough* was published between 1911 and 1915. Robert Ackerman discusses the writing of the Cambridge Ritualists during 1912-14 as the 'years of achievement' which saw the publication of Harrison's *Themis* (1912), containing an essay by Gilbert Murray, 'Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy', and her *Ancient Art and Ritual*; Cornford's *From Religion to Philosophy* (1912) and *The Origins of Attic Comedy* (1914); Murray's *Four Stages of Greek Religion, Euripides and His Age*, and his essay 'Hamlet and Orestes' (1914); plus Arthur Bradley Cook's *Zeus* (1914). See Robert Ackerman, *The Myth and Ritual School: J. G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists* (New York: Garland, 1991), pp. 118-19. Ackerman's account tends to underestimate the sheer range of writing between 1909 and 1914 that proposed theories about ritual drama. Among these are William Ridgeway's *The Origins of Tragedy with Special Reference to the Greek Tragedians* (1910) and *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of the Non-European Races in Special Reference to Greek Tragedy* (1914), and Farnell's *The Cults of the Greek States* (1896-1914). The latter two writers fiercely contest

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Frazer's distinguished mentor, E. B. Tylor.⁸ Lawrence admired Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871) and its exhaustive analysis of the mythopoeic consciousness of archaic man. To two different correspondents he expressed his strong preference for it over *The Golden Bough*, with its tedious multiplication of examples and lack of a robust theoretical framework.⁹ Lawrence viewed the Persephone myth as an instance of what Tylor had designated as 'survivals', those primitive or ancient forms of thought and practice which obdurately resist the impulse of change and linger into later culture, thus revealing continuity between early and more developed forms of civilization. In these rare and anomalous fragments, Lawrence saw signs of a hidden potency to reinvigorate those demoralised by instrumental social relations. He would have endorsed Tylor's thesis that there was 'no human thought so primitive as to have lost its bearing on our own thought, nor so ancient as to have broken its connection with our own life'.¹⁰

Lawrence signifies in *The Lost Girl* that the Persephone myth, as a focus of the fractured but resurgent union of mother, daughter, and the earth's prodigal fecundity, cannot be altogether erased by the tale of brutish male dominance superimposed upon it.¹¹ Lawrence's goal in pursuing these 'dark gods' is to overhaul stale conventions privileged by the life of unflagging domestic service, and to refresh them with potencies drawn from a primordial and dateless past. *The Lost Girl* supplies myriad iterations of the underworld and of Persephone's arduous journey into that subterranean site, as well as sundry accounts of Persephone's responses to those separate odysseys. Lawrence is careful to suggest that Alvina does not merely survive crude male control; rather, while encountering the chthonic she acquires a certain primal strength and in part takes charge of the atavistic forces (Ciccio, for example). However, when Alvina emigrates to Italy the novel renders a deepening and darkening of the journeys into underworld experience, an edgier sense of what the quest for fresh sensation entails as Alvina's bright hopes turn to sad bewilderment and distress on the foreign 'margins'. In the closing chapters, Lawrence himself seems to hesitate on the 'brink', unsure about the grave risks associated with surrendering to the ambience of southern Italy. This may also be his most impudent statement about

many of the central assumptions promulgated by the Ritualists. See Harry C. Payne, 'Modernizing the Ancients'.

⁸ Lawrence's letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 7 April 1916. See *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, II, pp. 591-93.

⁹ John B. Vickery argues that Lawrence's involvement in a mythopoeic vision was grounded to a major degree in the figurative patterns of *The Golden Bough*. See John B. Vickery, *The Literary Impact of 'The Golden Bough'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

¹⁰ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, II, p. 452.

¹¹ See Phillip Herring, 'Caliban in Nottingham: D. H. Lawrence's *The Lost Girl*', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas*, 12 (1979), 9-19.

Persephone: the myth permits a space for provocative contradiction and radical ambivalence.

At the outset, Alvina Houghton is candid and fearless: 'young men' are 'scared away' by her 'odd, derisive look at the back of her eyes'.¹² Alvina's 'look of old knowledge' (*LG*, p. 21) is linked to her choice of profession; her work as a midwife, evoking Demeter's capacity as a nurse,¹³ evinces an instinctive healing capacity which soothes both a dying mother and an ailing governess: with them 'she was so swift and sensitive in her nursing, she seemed to have second sight' (*LG*, p. 50).¹⁴ In Lawrence's distinctive treatment, an ancient story illustrating the seasonal decay and revival of vegetation is transmuted into a tool that goes beyond the exploration of interpersonal experience to dissect the phenomenon of war and the mysteries of identity once the rational, disciplinary traits of selfhood are stripped away: '[w]as Alvina her own real self all this time? The mighty question arises upon us, what is one's own real self?' (*LG*, p. 34)

Through imaginative excavation of the Persephone myth, Lawrence seeks to debunk smothering fantasies of matrimony and domesticity, with their smug reliance on the aesthetic closure of romantic love. *The Lost Girl* also belittles the traditional tropes and techniques of the *bildungsroman* genre that charts the subject's experience of individuation and eventual bargaining with the joyless custodians of society's gilded cage. By contrast, Lawrence's novel traces a trajectory of increasing disillusionment with, and detachment from, the ignorant insularity of 'home', through the heroine's fierce commitment to a stolid Italian suitor, Ciccio Marasca.¹⁵ Such a narrative – piercing the stagnating veil of custom, unravelling bourgeois shibboleths and the

¹² D. H. Lawrence, *The Lost Girl*, ed. by John Worthen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. 21. Hereafter referred to as *LG*.

¹³ There is evidence in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* of the mother-goddess's role as a nurse. As Helene P. Foley professes, '[w]e cannot be certain of the language and imagery used in the secret rites of Eleusis, but [...] in the timeless and static world of death, the initiate (of either sex) perhaps imagined becoming a divine "child" eternally nursed in the bosom of Persephone'. See *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, p. 141.

¹⁴ Even the plumber Arthur Witham intuitively perceives Alvina's natural energy as a fertility figure in the scene where he injures his leg in the church and twice blindly presses her hands over his bloody wound to stop the bleeding: '[t]hink how he had pressed her hand gently but firmly down, down over his bruise, how he had taken the virtue out of her, till she felt all weak and dim'. (*LG*, p. 77)

¹⁵ For a detailed explanation of *The Lost Girl*'s genesis see John Worthen's introduction to the Cambridge edition. The novel began as a story entitled 'Elsa Culverwell', which Lawrence worked on after finishing *Sons and Lovers* in 1912, then quickly abandoned in favour of a novel provisionally titled 'The Insurrection of Miss Houghton'. The latter in turn was abandoned in favour of 'The Sisters', which eventually became *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. Lawrence left 'The Insurrection' in Bavaria when he and Frieda stayed there in 1913; after several unsuccessful efforts to recover it during the war, he finally had it in hand again in December of 1919.

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hegemony of mind over body – Lawrence believed Forster incapable of writing. In a letter of 28 January 1915, Lawrence challenged his friend:

What do you want for yourself? You used to want the fulfilment of the natural animal in you – which is after all only an immediate need. So you made an immediate need seem the Ultimate Necessity – so you belied and betrayed yourself. I don't know where you've got after *Howards End*.¹⁶

The only other novel by Forster to which Lawrence alludes in his letter is *A Room with a View*. A concern uniting all the novels Forster had published before *Howards End* was the need for protagonists to break free from the social landscapes and cultural ideologies of 'this grubby penny-picking England' (*LG*, p. 87), so as to fulfil 'the natural animal' in themselves; thus Lawrence's jibe also becomes a disparagement of Forster's Cambridge faith in the centrality and sanctity of personal relations.¹⁷ But *The Lost Girl* also records an escape from insidious social protocol and class differentials, fortifying Forster's conviction that '[r]espectability kills so much more than I once supposed'.¹⁸

However, the key difference between Forster and Lawrence resides in their attitude towards what the former terms in *The Longest Journey* 'the grey monotony that surrounds all cities' (*LJ*, p. 27). Forster, repelled by the social and cultural agendas pushed to the forefront of public consciousness by hectic suburban sprawl, looks to agrarian Sussex, Wiltshire, and beyond, to Western Europe for the consoling wellspring of animistic potency that the Persephone myth enshrines. In his BBC broadcast about Lawrence of 16 April 1930, Forster signalled that his recently deceased one-time friend was most effectual as a writer when making readers feel that 'we have assisted at a great mystical ceremony' in which the 'landscape has come alive'.¹⁹

¹⁶ See *The Letter of D. H. Lawrence*, II, p. 266. In this letter Lawrence hardly does *Howards End* justice when he posits that the central characters are only preoccupied by immediate needs or that the novel finally endorses such a concern. Lawrence had read *Howards End* in June 1911 and had recommended it to his fiancée Louie Burrows as 'exceedingly good and very discussable'. See *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, I, p. 278.

¹⁷ Despite these local criticisms, Lawrence's opinion of Forster's oeuvre was altogether more positive. See Paul Delany, 'Lawrence and E. M. Forster: Two Rainbows', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 8 (1975), 54-62; Christopher Orr, 'D. H. Lawrence and E. M. Forster: From *The White Peacock* to *Maurice*', *Bulletin of the West Virginia Association of College English Teachers*, 2 (1975), 22-28; Paul Delany, 'Lawrence and Forster: First Skirmish with Bloomsbury', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 11 (1978), 63-72.

¹⁸ Forster, *The Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, I, p. 218.

¹⁹ In this broadcast Forster spoke at greater length and more energetically about *The Plumed Serpent* than about any other work by Lawrence. To Forster, Lawrence was 'both preacher and poet, and some people, myself included, do not sympathise with the preaching. Yet I feel that without the preaching the poetry could not exist. With some writers one can disentangle the two, with him they were inseparable. As he grew older, he became more didactic and mannered, and,

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Forster's fiction registers the difficulty of conjuring up a 'living landscape' since his relationship to the experience of 'England' is vitiated by an anaesthetising and elastic 'civilization' of 'semi-detached villas' (*LJ*, p. 27), coupled with the enlargement of industrial and mining towns like Woodhouse in *The Lost Girl*. Forster's early novels confront the emerging paradox that swift suburban expansion, whose very rationale was to supply comfortable homes and hence stability, in fact aggravated a biting sense of dislocation.²⁰ *The Lost Girl* depicts the 'vast, stony, dilapidated [...] streets of Islington, grey, grey, greyer by far than Woodhouse' (*LG*, p. 31), but also affirms that Forster's heartland of irreversible cultural decline – its class boundaries remade by dramatically shifting demographic patterns – might be excavated to expose a plentiful source of elemental energy, reconstituting those Lawrentian 'nomads'²¹ brave enough to immerse themselves in its subterranean rhythms.

The cheerless uniformity and anonymity of the English provincial town symbolises in both *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End* the diminution and dilution of personal, aesthetic, and national ambitions.²² Forster transforms the countryside into a psychological location divorced from class divisions and social actualities; through his fascination with embattled bucolic sanctuaries his faith in English continuities is exalted into a private inner myth – a myth governed by fierce resistance to the dispiriting physical

if one differed from him, more tiresome; but the poetry, also, was increasing in strength. *The Plumed Serpent* blares out explicitly what the snowdrops in *The White Peacock* shyly hinted at, yet, exquisite as were those early woodlands, they droop towards unreality beneath the sunlight of Mexico. In a sense he never developed. One can hear from the first what he is going to say, but one never knows what his own message will evoke in him, and although I cannot believe in it, I believe it was the mainspring of his greatness'. Published in *The Listener*, 30 April 1930. On Forster's assessment that *The Plumed Serpent* represented Lawrence's 'finest novel', see G. K. Das, 'Lawrence and Forster: their Vision of a "Living Religion"', in *The Spirit of D. H. Lawrence: Centenary Essays*, ed. by Gamini Salgado and G. K. Das (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1988), p. 155.

²⁰ W. B. Yeats, looking back from 1931, averred that modern civilisation was based upon a stability and continuity epitomised by the integration of house and home ('A spot whereon the founders lived and died / Seemed once more dear than life'), and that it was betrayed by social mobility ('We shift about – all that great glory spent / Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent'). See 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931', in *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 276. This perception is extended in Mary Butts's preservationist pamphlets of the 1930s.

²¹ Alvina Houghton in *The Lost Girl* can be viewed in terms of the migrant and nomad figures that Deleuze and Guattari put into play. The migrant is characterised by flight and reterritorialisation, while the nomad 'can be called the Deterritorialised par excellence [...] precisely because there is no reterritorialisation *afterward* as with the migrant, or upon *something else* as with the sedentary'. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 381.

²² See Anne Wright, *Literature of Crisis, 1910-22* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

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features of industrial and suburban housing.²³ Forster's suburbs typify the haphazard excrescence of modernity rendered concrete, but for Lawrence this patchy and piecemeal housing is merely a thin film stretched across, without entirely smothering, a fountainhead of largely untapped chthonic verve. This crucial difference also filters through their common admiration for Hardy's oeuvre. Forster, who actually knew Hardy, could not give him the highest accolade of all in *Aspects of the Novel*, but denoted the nature of his feeling for him when, comparing him with Meredith, he observed, 'the work of Hardy is my home and that of Meredith cannot be'.²⁴

The point which draws both Forster and Lawrence is the place of the 'passional' in Hardy's finessing of the Persephone myth – the insistent focus upon drives that subsist below the crust of quotidian response, creating private dramas at war with established patterns of corporate behaviour, desires which the entrapments of business and marriage cannot appease. Forster mines the 'passional' in localities sufficiently divorced from the suburban mediocrity that is an inevitable by-product of the vast over-accumulation of capital in London, Glasgow, and the Midlands. Lawrence was impatient with the frail aesthetic utopias refined by what he judged as Forster's fey neo-Romantic sensibility, with its retrograde organicism, idealised expatriate narratives, and melding of classical and national myths. Instead he furnishes a version of the Midlands as a parallel universe of ostensibly unlovely topography, beneath which something else flows – truer, more visceral and jarring, harnessed by those eager to learn from it. It is a trait that Aldous Huxley phrased as receptivity to

the mystery of the world [...] Lawrence could never forget, as most of us almost continuously forget, the dark presence of the otherness that lies beyond the boundaries of man's conscious mind.²⁵

²³ See Daniel R. Schwarz, *The Transformation of the English Novel, 1890-1930: Studies in Hardy, Conrad, Joyce, Lawrence, Forster and Woolf* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995); Stuart Sillars, *Structure and Dissolution in English Writing, 1910-1920* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Calvin Bedient, *Architects of the Self: George Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, and E. M. Forster* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1972); John David Russell, *Style in Modern British Fiction: Studies in Joyce, Lawrence, Forster, Lewis, and Green* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); John Beer, 'Literature of Crisis, 1910-22: *Howards End*, *Heartbreak House*, *Women in Love* and *The Waste Land*: Forster, Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury', *Aligarh Journal of English Studies*, 5 (1980), 6-37.

²⁴ Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 66.

²⁵ Aldous Huxley, 'Introduction', in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Huxley (New York: Viking, 1932), pp. xi-xii.

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The Lost Girl dramatises the irony of Lawrence's central protagonist Alvina Houghton, an apparently foredoomed spinster, defying the imprisoning conventionality of an insipid Midlands town not by rising above it, but by searching below it, to glimpse a panorama of spiritual and erotic possibility.²⁶

II

Alvina is reminiscent of the Nietzschean figure of the tightrope walker from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, who makes confronting the perilous and the precarious his true calling, 'who does not know how to live, except by going under'.²⁷ As Lawrence declares in his essay 'The Spirit of Place':

[m]en are only free when they are doing what the deepest self likes. And there is getting down to the deepest self! It takes some diving. Because the deepest self is way down, and the conscious self is an obstinate monkey.²⁸

Although the crucial reference to Persephone towards the end of *The Lost Girl*'s opening chapter is couched in terms of exultant, enabling ascent – 'Dame Fortune would rise like Persephone out of the earth' (*LG*, p. 17) – Lawrence is more struck by the notion of radical existential experimentation through descent into a site of raw potentiality, subordinating conscious promptings to the interiority and authenticity of 'the deepest self'. This process repudiates the estranging watery light of the Midlands for unbearably fecund darkness, bestowed upon those, like Alvina, who traverse the 'boundaries between two worlds' (*LG*, p. 63).²⁹ Alvina undertakes two modes of expatriation: a spiritual or psychological journey inward towards a

²⁶ See Robert Burden, *Radicalizing Lawrence: Critical Interventions in the Reading and Reception of D. H. Lawrence's Narrative Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000); Leo Gurko, 'D.H. Lawrence as a "Dickens of the Midlands"', *PMLA*, 78 (1963), 601-5.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 127. Alvina might also be regarded as one of Nietzsche's 'philosophers of the future': 'By the name with which I ventured to christen them, I expressly emphasized their experimentation and their delight in experimentation. Did I do this because, as critics in body and soul, they will love to make use of experimentation in a new, perhaps wider, perhaps more dangerous sense? In their passion for new insight, must they go farther in bold and painful experiments than the emasculate and morbid taste of a democratic century can approve? [...] In fact, among themselves they will admit to a certain pleasure in saying "no", in dissecting, and in a certain circumspect cruelty which knows how to handle the knife surely and delicately, even when the heart is bleeding.' See *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. by Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Regnery, 1955), pp. 132-33.

²⁸ D. H. Lawrence, 'The Spirit of Place', in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1923), p.17.

²⁹ See Robert Burden, 'Parody, Stylization, and Dialogics: A Bakhtinian Reading of *The Lost Girl*', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 30 (2002), 25-42.

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conception of identity that comprises a prolific multiplicity of selves, and outward in a gruelling physical odyssey of attempted deliverance. *The Lost Girl* is structured to test the urgent questions that the eponymous hero asks Rawdon Lily in *Aaron's Rod*: 'Shall you be any different in yourself, in another place? [...] What's the use of going somewhere else? You won't change yourself'. To which Rawdon replies: 'I'm not only just one proposition. A new place brings out a new thing in a man'.³⁰

Alvina's actual 'voyage out' from the alienated frustration of provincial England to domicile in Italy does not occur until the closing fifty pages of a novel of 400 pages. Unlike Forster's Italian fictions, in which characters only achieve any kind of self-realisation once they have crossed the Channel, Lawrence shows Alvina embarking upon a number of both geographic and figurative migrations and returns within England itself, rehearsing an expatriate adventure that paradoxically carries her 'home' to her 'own true nature' (*LG*, p. 21). By conceiving Alvina as a Persephone figure who survives the sordid nullity of imaginative and intellectual life in her 'winty' provincial town, escaping to the 'springtime' of a remote Italian hill-village,³¹ Lawrence revises not only the limitations of Forster's early novels, but also his admired predecessor Thomas Hardy's intensely pessimistic use of the Persephone myth in *Tess*. Lawrence deplores Hardy's portrayal of Tess Durbeyfield because after the night of her rape/seduction she cannot rise from the ashes of her ravaged reputation.³² Tess, in Lawrence's opinion, 'cannot separate' herself 'from the mass which bore' her, and so she becomes a 'pathetic rather than tragic' figure, barred from that condition of perpetual becoming to which Alvina aspires.³³

Hardy's Persephone figure, in Lawrence's opinion, never transcends the traumatic consequences of her 'underworld' experience.³⁴ Whatever his

³⁰ D. H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod*, ed. by Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 103.

³¹ See Marilyn Adler Papayanis, 'Italy's Best Gift: D. H. Lawrence and the Ethos of Expatriation', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 14 (2003), 289-316.

³² For an overview of the literary treatment of 'lost' women in the generation before Lawrence's, see Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1993).

³³ D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, pp. 45-46.

³⁴ See John Bayley, 'Lawrence and Hardy: The One and the Many', *Phoenix*, 23 (1981), 5-9; Norman Page, 'Hardy, Lawrence, and the Working-Class Hero', in *English Literature and the Working Class*, ed. by Francisco García Tortosa and Ramón López Ortega, (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 1980); H. L. Weatherby, 'Old-Fashioned Gods: Eliot on Lawrence and Hardy', *Sewanee Review*, 75 (1967), 301-16; Ross C. Murfin, *Swinburne, Hardy, Lawrence and the Burden of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Lawrence Jones, 'Imagery and the "Idiosyncratic Mode of Regard": Eliot, Hardy, and Lawrence', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 12 (1981), 29-49; Danna Phillips, 'Lawrence's Understanding

reservations, Lawrence would have appreciated his predecessor's readiness to exploit the artistic possibilities afforded by the Persephone myth, blending the realistic and the archetypal in his female characterisation. Lawrence's Alvina, encountering the Plutonic, undergoes a process of being mythicized; instead of studiously cultivating conscious social or personal identity, as in traditional novelistic treatment, she is divested of it, assuming the role of a primordial archetype.³⁵ Until well into her twenties, Alvina lives in Woodhouse (the name suggests a coffin); like Bestwood in *Sons and Lovers* (1913), it is a close-knit and stultifying community in which Alvina feels she is losing an ability to respond to the nuances of felt sensation. And she refuses to let the petty provinciality of the pinched Woodhouse mindset defeat her ambitions as it has her woolly-minded and quixotic draper father's. Alvina's urgent struggle against the toils of 'high-mindedness' (*LG*, p. 35) has an absurdly comic counterpoint: her father's persistent efforts to make his fanciful avant-garde commercial ventures profitable in a town whose inhabitants are generally myopic, mundane, and bigoted.

That Alvina inherits some of her father's resolve and haughty aloofness shows in her unwavering opposition to the precepts of the community that has reared her. *The Lost Girl* is 'concerned from the start to portray [Alvina] as a woman with choices. She is not single from lack of opportunity [...] has her financial independence, women friends and colleagues, and work she enjoys'.³⁶ This is Lawrence's muscular riposte to Hardy's rigorous concentration on the intractability of deprivation in *Tess* and *Jude the Obscure*. Lawrence was determined that his bracingly revisionist account of Persephone in *The Lost Girl* would not duplicate *Tess*'s anguished pattern, in which Hardy tailors the mythic material to expose the abridgement of women's control over their own words, bodies, and destinies.³⁷ According to Lawrence in *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914):

of Miriam through Sue', *Recovering Literature: A Journal of Contextualist Criticism*, 7 (1979), 46-56.

³⁵ In her review of *The Lost Girl* for *The Times Literary Supplement*, Virginia Woolf hoped for a novel that would explore women's sexual lives with originality, but instead, 'Alvina disappears beneath the heap of facts recorded about her, and the only sense in which we feel her to be lost is that we can no longer believe in her existence'. See Virginia Woolf, 'Review of *The Lost Girl*, by D. H. Lawrence', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 December 1920, quoted in *D.H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by R. P. Draper, p. 143.

³⁶ Sargent, 'The Lost Girl', in *D. H. Lawrence in Italy*, ed. by Donaldson and Kalnins, p. 179.

³⁷ See Andrew Radford, 'The Making of a Goddess: Hardy, Lawrence and Persephone', *Connotations*, 12 (2004), 202-32.

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[Hardy] cannot help himself, but must stand with the average against the exception, he must, in his ultimate judgement represent the interests of humanity, or the community as a whole, and rule out the individual interest. To do this [Hardy] must go against himself. His private sympathy is always with the individual, against the community [...] Therefore he will create a more or less blameless individual and, making him seek his own fulfilment [...] will show him destroyed by the community, or by that in himself which represents the community³⁸

The *Study*, while furnishing a deeply personal and shrewd reading of the Wessex Novels, also manifests Lawrence's firm intention to craft a new sensibility and a new woman in modernist fiction: Alvina, though an 'outsider', socially 'off the map', can yet 'stand on her own ground' (*LG*, pp. 117-8).³⁹ He avers that Hardy permits his moral 'judgement' to outweigh his passionate support for venturesome personalities like Tess, who flouts the corrosive cant of the wider 'community'.⁴⁰ That the established ordinances of life in this 'community' and its deadening disappointments should derail a Wessex character is, according to Lawrence, Hardy's artistic failure.⁴¹ Lawrence also indicts the remorseless logic of public ensnarement in Arnold Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902), a novel *The Lost Girl* superficially resembles in its opening gambit.⁴²

But she [Anna] continued to think of Mynors. She envied him for his cheerfulness, his joy, his goodness, his dignity, his tact, his sex. She envied every man. Even in the sphere of religion, men were not fettered like women. No man, she thought, would acquiesce in the futility to which she had already half resigned; a man would either wring salvation from the heavenly powers or race gloriously to hell. Mynors – Mynors was a god!⁴³

³⁸ D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, p. 49.

³⁹ For discussion of 'New Woman' fiction and Lawrence's relation to it, see Sandra Gilbert, 'Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature', *Critical Inquiry*, (1980), 391-417; Carroll Smith-Rosenburg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), pp. 245-96; Janice H. Harris, 'Lawrence and the Edwardian Feminists', *The Challenge of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Michael Squires and Keith Cushman (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 62-76.

⁴⁰ See Michael Squires, *The Pastoral Novel: Studies in George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence* (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1974).

⁴¹ As Sargent declares, 'Lawrence saw himself in some sense rewriting *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* [...]. His lost girl was not morally lost (in spite of her sexual experience before marriage) but creatively lost: society couldn't destroy her because she was lost to the everyday world of the known, busy exploring the unknown'. See 'The Lost Girl', in *D. H. Lawrence in Italy*, ed. by Donaldson and Kalnins, p. 189.

⁴² See David Norton, 'Lawrence, Wells, and Bennett: Influence and Tradition', *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association*, 54 (1980), 171-90; Christopher Heywood, 'D. H. Lawrence's *The Lost Girl* and Its Antecedents by George Moore and Arnold Bennett', *English Studies*, 47 (1966), 131-34.

⁴³ Arnold Bennett, *Anna of the Five Towns* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 75.

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Alvina is not stymied by 'envy' for the unfettered freedoms that her male counterparts blithely take for granted in Woodhouse. Like the complacent Sydney suburbia in Lawrence's *Kangaroo* (1923), Woodhouse is 'sprinkled on the surface of a darkness into which it never penetrated' (K, p. 13); it is Alvina who will 'race gloriously to hell' in order to savour the darkness as purgative release, remaking/unmaking herself in the interstices of a modern administered milieu. This 'frail, pallid, diffident girl' (LG, p. 34) evinces an uncompromising independence and self-sufficiency, resisting 'affirmation of ordinary life',⁴⁴ and 'invincible in the struggle' (LG, p. 37); as the narrator concedes, it was 'nothing less than magical the way the soft, slumbering body of the woman could leap in one jet into terrible, overwhelming volatile force, something strange and massive' (LG, p. 38).⁴⁵ This is in stark contrast to Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923), whose Persephone figure Mrs Forrester dies foiled by a society that demonises her spirited insouciance; her ghost is invoked from the underworld of Niel Herbert's bitter memories:

He would like to call up the shade of the young Mrs. Forrester, as the Witch of Endor called up Samuel's, and challenge it, demand the secret of that ardour; ask her whether she had really found some ever-blooming, ever-burning, ever-piercing joy, or whether it was all fine play-acting. Probably she had found no more than another; but she had always the power of suggesting things much lovelier than herself, as the perfume of a single flower may call up the whole sweetness of spring.⁴⁶

It is Lawrence's novel that shows to what extent Alvina salvages a fund of 'ever-piercing joy' from her lacklustre environs, while combating the insidious 'elements of a young ladies' education' (LG, p. 11).⁴⁷

III

Like Hardy, Forster and Webb before him, Lawrence chronicles the unrelenting attenuation and occlusion of the creative and vital by the urban bourgeoisie, whose crass manners is the object of much satirical brio in *The Lost Girl's* archly disruptive and abrasively self-reflexive first chapter.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 14.

⁴⁵ See Michael Squires, 'D. H. Lawrence's Narrators, Sources of Knowledge, and the Problem of Coherence', *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 37 (1995), 469-91.

⁴⁶ Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 175. See also Richard Swigg, *D. H. Lawrence, Hardy, and American Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

⁴⁷ See Joyce Wexler, 'D. H. Lawrence Through a Postmodernist Lens', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 27 (1997-1998), 47-64.

⁴⁸ See H. M. Daleski, 'The Encoding of *The Lost Girl*', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 30 (2001), 17-28; John Alcorn, *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 78-

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In Woodhouse, there was a terrible crop of old maids among the [...] tradespeople and the clergy. The whole town of women, colliers' wives and all, held its breath as it saw a chance of one of these daughters of comfort and woe getting off. They flocked to the well-to-do weddings with an intoxication of relief. (*LG*, p. 2)

Alvina and her father cannot fulfil their dreams of a more rewarding existence beyond what Webb terms 'the architecture of crowd-morality' because their Midlands neighbours are both basely Philistine and sniping.⁴⁹ Nor can Alvina gain sustenance from her own mother Clariss Houghton, whom Lawrence portrays as an irredeemably weakened Demeter, a 'heart-stricken [...] invalid' (*LG*, p. 11) compelled to cede maternal sway to the redoubtable governess Miss Frost. Clariss Houghton shares little with the Good Mother described by Melanie Klein, the 'generous dispenser of love, nourishment and plenitude'⁵⁰ who mutes the power of death and dissolves the anxiety occasioned by all of life's sudden separations. Clariss is banished to a shabby back bedroom in Manchester House – marginalized, petulant, and tormented by neurotic anxiety:

At half-past six in the morning there was a clatter of feet and girls' excited tongues along the backyard and up the wooden stairway outside the back wall. The poor invalid heard every clack and every vibration. Every morning alike, she felt an invasion of some enemy was breaking in on her. And all day long the low, steady rumble of sewing-machines overhead seemed like the low drumming of a bombardment upon her weak heart. To make matters worse, James Houghton decided that he must have his sewing-machines driven by some extra-human force. He installed another plant of machinery – acetylene or some such contrivance – which was intended to drive all the little machines from one big belt. Hence a further throbbing and shaking in the upper regions, truly terrible to endure. (*LG*, p. 10)

Against the positive unfolding of selfhood and expansion of sympathy that Alvina attains exploring the chthonic terrain of Throttle-Ha'Penny coalmine, Lawrence signifies here with a complex mixture of impishly sardonic wit and genuine pathos, a 'truly terrible' site of female disenfranchisement. The mystical 'reverberations' so redemptive for the daughter in the coalmine, are measured against the deafening din generated by the boisterous sewing-

89; Rosemary Sumner, *A Route to Modernism: Hardy, Lawrence, Woolf* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Michael L. Ross, 'Losing the Old National Hat: Lawrence's *The Lost Girl*', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 30 (2001), 5-16.

⁴⁹ The herd-instinct berated by Webb and Lawrence also evokes Jane Ellen Harrison's view that traditional beliefs, including religious opinions, are tenaciously held because they are induced not by personal experience, but by what Harrison calls 'herd suggestion', or what used to be designated as 'faith'. See Harrison, *Heresy and Humanity* (London: Watts, 1911), pp. 35-41.

⁵⁰ Tori Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 115.

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machine girls employed by Alvina's father, the clueless commercial adventurer James Houghton.

Lawrence differs markedly from his predecessors in the degree to which he avows the immeasurable worth of Alvina's subterranean encounter over malign social and moral prohibitions. Unlike Tess Durbeyfield, who ultimately 'sided with the community's condemnation of her', Alvina will not be 'destroyed' by the mainstream majority, and she is spared the shackles of 'herd-instinct'. Borrowing Lawrence's terms in the *Study of Thomas Hardy*, Alvina is 'individualist', 'beyond the average'; she 'chooses to rule' her own life to her 'own completion'.⁵¹ Alvina revels in the possibilities of relationship obscurely encoded in sensory and affective experience, transcending the multiple pressures of place and history that Hardy felt so despairingly in his final Wessex novels. Lawrence's vehement drive to portray a convention-breaking character, innately distrustful of stodgy attitudes that dictate presumptuously to everyday experience, whose revolt against the 'community' largely succeeds, is signalled by the original working title *The Insurrection of Miss Houghton*. In his review of 'Georgian Poetry, 1911-12' Lawrence almost venomously positioned Hardy, along with Ibsen and Flaubert, as one of 'the nihilists, the intellectual, hopeless people' who exemplify 'a dream of demolition',⁵² from which his own war-ravaged generation must rouse itself. In *The Lost Girl*, the chafing unease of English petit bourgeois living, conveyed by the 'incarceration' of Clariss Houghton in a dingy corner of Manchester House, need not be an insurmountable barrier to Alvina's ambitions.⁵³ Though as one critic remarks 'for Hardy, Lawrence's sense of freedom would be delusion'.⁵⁴

If, according to H. D. in *Bid Me to Live* (1960), the past had been blasted to hell in 1917 and the old order was dead, then Lawrence would ensure that his references to Persephone were imbued with intimations of hopeful metamorphosis in *The Lost Girl*. He does not consider the danger of deploying timeless archetypes that may work to naturalize gender oppression, and he lacks a rigorously defined sense of the political implications of classical reference in relation to the contemporary woman question. His chief concern is to present Alvina responding positively to her enforced withdrawal into a 'paroxysm of unbearable sensation' (*LG*, p. 175) with its manifold and

⁵¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, p. 46.

⁵² D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. by Anthony Beal (London, 1956), p. 72.

⁵³ See Carol Siegel, 'Virginia Woolf's and Katherine Mansfield's Responses to D.H. Lawrence's Fiction', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 21 (1990), 291-311.

⁵⁴ Mark Kinkad-Weekes, 'Lawrence on Hardy', in *Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years*, ed. and intro. by Lance St. John Butler (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 102.

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abstruse promptings of feeling; she moves towards a comprehension of how beauty and violence form essential parts of the world she lives in.⁵⁵

To 'know the earth [...] Plutonic' Lawrence suggests, is to register it by sensuous awareness, allowing Alvina to keep her remarkable powers fresh in a moribund milieu. This cuts against the prevailingly pensive tone of Hardy's *Tess*, in which the reunion of Demeter and Persephone in the myth contrasts with the equilibrium his heroine never regains after the night of rape/ seduction by Alec d'Urberville. Lawrence dramatises Persephone's abduction by Pluto as a benefit – albeit a mixed one – to Alvina, who is thus saved from emotional death-in-life by a partner who balances out her own qualities. Believing that one's daylight identity must connect with 'hell' – with instinctual lower faculties and even with the earth itself – Lawrence registers the reanimating potential of an 'underworld', without recourse to the paranoid and punitive imagery of Christian hellfire that affects the dreams of Hardy's doomed heroine in *Tess*. This is exemplified in Chapter 4 of *The Lost Girl*.

IV

When Alvina visits the Throttle-Ha'penny pit operated by her flighty father, she senses for the first time the condition of 'underneathness' as a creative augmentation of selfhood rather than James's ignominious slide down the socio-economic ladder during the decline of Manchester House: '[t]his was coming down in the world, with a vengeance' (*LG*, p. 15). Throttle-Ha'penny represents a stratum of primitive vitality normally overlaid by strict moral and social conditioning. Lawrence disrupts the partitioning of reality that separates the human from the natural world. A startling shift of perception takes place, from a banal everyday mode to a disorienting and much less definable mode, unencumbered by the strictures of logic, in which Alvina is both enraptured onlooker and eager participant. The 'downwardness' invokes a different, and more dynamic form of temporality from the merely chronological, which it holds in abeyance. The pit and the colliers, a realm of male physical industrial labour, gives Alvina a hint of the currents flowing beneath the surface of her cramped, dispiriting petit bourgeois life. Lawrence

⁵⁵ See also Elizabeth M. Fox, 'Psychodynamics, Seeing, and Being in D. H. Lawrence', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46 (2000), 971-77. Richard T. Driskill, *Madonnas and Maidens: Sexual Confusion in Lawrence and Gide* (New York: Peter Lang 1999); David J. Gordon, 'Sex and Language in D. H. Lawrence', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 27 (1981), 362-75; John Haegert, 'D. H. Lawrence and the Aesthetics of Transgression', *Modern Philology*, 88 (1990), 2-25; Michael Black, "'Theorizing Myself Out' – Lawrence after *Sons and Lovers: The Burns Novel* and *Elsa Culverwell*", *Cambridge Quarterly*, 26 (1997), 242-62.

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captures a note of excited confusion – immersion in an utterly unfamiliar element, rather than the awful 'shock' Alvina has to cope with during her training as a nurse:

the dreadful things she saw in the lying-in hospital, and afterwards, went deep, and finished her youth and tutelage for ever. How many infernos deeper than Miss Frost could ever know, did she not travel? The inferno of the human animal, the human organism in its convulsions. (*LG*, p. 33)

The working was low, you must stoop all the time. The roof and the timbered sides of the way seemed to press on you. It was as if she were in her tomb forever, like the dead and everlasting Egyptians. She was frightened, but fascinated. The collier kept on talking to her, stretching his bare, grey-black, hairy arm across her vision, and pointing with his knotted hand. The thick-wicked tallow candles guttered and smelled. There was a thickness in the air, a sense of dark, fluid presence in the thick atmosphere, the dark, fluid, viscous voice of the collier making a broad-vowelled, clapping sound in her ear. He seemed to linger near as if he knew – as if he knew – what? Something forever unknowable and inadmissible, something that belonged purely to the underground: to the slaves who work underground: knowledge humiliated, subjected, but ponderous and inevitable. (*LG*, p. 47)

Lawrence gains from existing mythologies to craft enigmatic, arresting myths of his own, refining new 'mysteries'. He utilises the primitive belief in the dead dwelling together in a common, subterranean abode when portraying the colliers. The quality of this darkness enables Alvina to recapture or reinstate lost links to a fundamental self that signifies a more harmonious blend of instinct and culture. This recalibrates the darkness of mere moral and intellectual confusion that enfolds Tess on the night of her rape/seduction among the primeval oaks of 'The Chase'. Lawrence underlines the paradoxical nature of being exposed to strange wells of secret life-force. The alertness to exhilarating yet frightening energies beating below the thick, ugly crust of railways and roads intensifies after Alvina settles in the Italian 'pre-world' of *The Lost Girl's* final section. When a collier stretches 'his bare, grey-black, hairy arm across her vision' a sensual energy impinges on Alvina's consciousness. By granting the dark centre of herself and her singular surroundings precedence over the stale formalities of the upper world, she finds herself caught between terror and amazement, pleasure and pain, liberation and suffocation. Her initiatory ordeal is into a secret knowledge of occult significance that all the colliers apparently share. The adroit mixture of Alvina's breathlessly rapt perspective ('you must stoop all the time'), and the unflustered, clinical point of view ('[I]t was as if she were in her tomb forever', 'she was frightened, but fascinated'), makes the 'you' absorb the reader's sense in the queasy imaginative descent. Lawrence also harnesses the multiple meanings of 'purely', recalling Hardy's controversial subtitle to *Tess* which defiantly declares that his 'Pure Woman'

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is 'faithfully presented'. *The Lost Girl* also challenges received cultural attitudes in this sphere. Purity as a bourgeois construct implies 'cleanness', 'chastity', 'whiteness', 'sanctity', 'good taste': terms wholly at odds with the peculiar ambience of Throttle-Ha'penny, or indeed the tenor of Alvina's personal life which scandalises the unsmiling sentinels of demure gentility in her town. That 'something forever unknowable and inadmissible' belonging 'purely to the underground' Lawrence links to Alvina's stupefied rediscovery of the primal roots of her being.⁵⁶

That the pit and the colliers afford Alvina a sexual awakening oversimplifies her multifaceted reaction to the seemingly oppressive environment, which leaves her feeling entombed like 'the dead and everlasting Egyptians'. The instinctual life, with all its excitations and commotions of feeling, glimpsed by Alvina in the second-rate mine cannot thrive in the mechanised English setting of *The Lost Girl*. She is trapped among social beings whose lives are consecrated to defending an ideology of decorous conduct that stipulates abstention from worldly pleasures. Throttle-Ha'penny is for Alvina a bizarre mode of emancipation from this mirthless brand of English 'breeding'.⁵⁷ She yields to the netherworld by temporarily surrendering lucid self-awareness. This is Alvina's first hesitant step towards merging with a series of cosmic and elemental counter-sites so that 'Hades' encompasses not only a chthonic divinity but also a fastidiously rendered physical locale and the interiorised topography of 'the deepest self' in Lawrence's essay 'The Spirit of Place': '[i]f one wants to be free, one has to give up the illusion of doing what one likes, and seek what IT [the deepest self] wishes done. But before you can do what IT likes, you must first break the spell of the old mastery, the old IT'.⁵⁸ The 'old mastery' denotes the lexicon of bourgeois individualism encoded in daylight consciousness, whose 'spell' Alvina tries to 'break' by visiting the subterranean realm:

And still his voice went on clapping in her ear, and still his presence edged near her, and seemed to impinge on her – a smallish, semi-grotesque, grey-obscure figure with a naked brandished forearm: not human: a creature of the subterranean world, melted out like a bat, fluid. She felt herself melting out also, to become a mere vocal ghost, a presence in the thick atmosphere. Her lungs felt thick and slow, her mind dissolved, she felt she could cling like a bat in the long swoon of the crannied, underworld darkness. Cling like a bat and sway forever swooning in the draughts of the darkness. (*LG*, p. 47)

⁵⁶ See Judith Ruderman, 'Rekindling the "Father-Spark": Lawrence's Ideal of Leadership in *The Lost Girl* and *The Plumed Serpent*', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 13 (1980), 239-59.

⁵⁷ See Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, 'The Call of the South: *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *The Lost Girl*', *Revue des Langues Vivantes*, 29 (1963), 336-57; Mark Spilka, *The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 88.

⁵⁸ D. H. Lawrence, 'The Spirit of Place', p. 18.

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The crisp contours of Alvina's civilised identity dissolve, and Lawrence intimates a quality of response so keen yet so fleeting and fugitive that the expressive resources of language fail to condense its essence. The 'creative' death indicated by this underneathness – a dismantling of material awareness – is of a completely different sort to the inertia with which her routinely repressive and claustrophobic existence threatens her. Indeed, this chthonic episode, in which Alvina could 'sway forever swooning in the draughts of the darkness', foreshadows her instinctual response to Ciccio: '[i]t was far more like pain, like agony, than like joy. She swayed herself to and fro in a paroxysm of unbearable sensation.' (LG, p. 175)

Lawrence's portrayal of Alvina's delirious 'descent' is intended partly as a reproach to those late-Victorian novelists such as Henry James who could not conceive of the chthonic except in the most desolating terms, as when Ralph Touchett, slowly dying of tuberculosis, reflects in *Portrait of a Lady* (1873): 'I don't want to die on the Sicilian plains – to be snatched away, like Proserpine in the same locality, to the Plutonian shades'.⁵⁹ This allusion recurs in Isabel Archer's fraught meditation on her marriage to Gilbert Osmond (Chapter 42), evincing the stark images of paralysis that Hardy would elaborate in *Tess*:

She had taken the first steps in the purest confidence, and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. Instead of leading to the high places of happiness, from which the world would seem to lie below one, so that one could look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity, it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard as from above, and where it served to deepen the feeling of failure. It was her deep distrust of her husband – this was what darkened the world.⁶⁰

Isabel realises she has become a 'Proserpine' in her union with Osmond, unwittingly consigned to a netherworld of unredeemed marital misery. Isabel's youthful vivacity, coupled with a headstrong refusal to entertain the possibility of 'failure' that it entails, underscores the pathos of the novel's inexorable trajectory towards those 'Plutonian' 'realms of restriction and depression'. Entering the prison-house of wedlock in a state of blithe ignorance about her own sexual drives makes Isabel a fascinating version of the motherless Persephone. Her matrimonial vows, in which she has promised not only to obey but also to honour her tormentor, like Persephone's unwilling consumption of the six pomegranate seeds, bind her to her subterranean descent.

⁵⁹ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 447.

⁶⁰ James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, pp. 474-75.

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What is striking about Alvina's descent into her father's coalmine is how comprehensively it rehabilitates the cheerlessly bleak terms of James's metaphorical Hades, in which Gilbert Osmond is a Pluto/Dis who ungrounds, desubstantiates, depersonalises, and converts his cultured victim into a sterile art-object or trophy. Through his diabolic influence, Isabel's existence passes from fullness, plenitude and cosmopolitan variety to the wanderings of a shade in a boundary-less, wraith-like domain, insubstantial yet not totally annihilated. Alvina, in her physical underworld, also becomes a 'mere vocal ghost, a presence in the thick atmosphere' (*LG*, p. 47), but it shares little with the numbing stasis of Isabel's fate, condemned to desensitising repetition. Though 'the working was low' Alvina is borne along by an impression of limitless freedom and advantage.

The newly liberated Alvina consorts with the unseemly itinerant troupers of James Houghton's vaudeville theatre, thus *sinking* to the bottom of 'polite' society – movement that mirrors her excited descent into the coalmine. Yet she maintains a peculiar gift: 'her ancient sapience went deep, deeper than Woodhouse could fathom. The young men did not like her for it' (*LG*, p. 35). She rejects all the suitors who would be considered appropriate and offends the sanctimonious superiority of her neighbours by marrying the impercipient Italian peasant Ciccio Marasca, which both concretises and parodies the notion of deliverance through subjection to a superior male articulated in *Aaron's Rod*: 'the deep, fathomless submission to the heroic soul in a greater man'.⁶¹ Alvina is self-responsible and willingly consigns herself to the exacting life of her husband's hill town. Her insurgency against the inflexible protocol and expectations of Woodhouse is a far cry from the scalding sense of parochial inevitability which Lawrence finds so disheartening in Hardy's *Tess*, where finer feelings are repeatedly subject to crushing extinction on the part of social custom. Lawrence records in the *Study of Thomas Hardy*:

[t]his is the theme of novel after novel: [...] be passionate, individual, wilful, you will find the security of the convention a walled prison, you will escape, and you will die, either of your own lack of strength to bear the isolation and the exposure, or by direct revenge from the community, or from both.⁶²

Alvina's subterranean trial signals how it is feasible to comprehend the rich darkness flowing beneath the 'walled prison' of Woodhouse mediocrity. It is feasible, Lawrence avows, to transcend in a moment of unguarded rapture, the limitations of a crudely materialistic culture 'with its smoke and its money-power and its squirming millions who aren't human any more' (*K*, p.

⁶¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod*, p. 299.

⁶² D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, p. 43.

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257).⁶³ Alvina's selfhood fuses with the environment as she melts bat-like into the thick, vital ambience. Her perceptions are markedly accentuated when she emerges from the pit, out of her 'swoon':

She blinked and peered at the world in amazement. What a pretty, luminous place it was, carved in substantial luminosity. What a strange and lovely place, bubbling iridescent-golden on the surface of the underworld. Iridescent-golden – could anything be more fascinating! Like lovely glancing surface on fluid pitch. But a velvet surface. A velvet surface of golden light, velvet-pile of gold and pale luminosity, and strange beautiful elevations of houses and trees, and depressions of fields and roads, all golden and floating like atmospheric majolica. Never had the common ugliness of Woodhouse seemed so entrancing [...] It was like a vision. Perhaps gnomes and subterranean workers, enslaved in the era of light, see with such eyes. (*LG*, pp. 47-48).

Alvina's epiphany furnishes a pithy contrast to Mrs Moore's reaction to the Marabar Caves, in which Forster reveals the fragility of the social self when assailed by unconscious impulses. In the Caves, Mrs Moore might be seen as a Demeter figure engulfed by an apocalyptic vision when searching for the pale, passionless Persephone Adela Quested. The old lady cannot cope with exposure to a destructive revelation of the psyche, and when she returns to the surface, finds that the physical terrain has lost all coherence, given its unsettling combination of tropical splendour and distressing aridity, its contours exuding an eerie substantiality, with little stress on colour, scent or fluctuation of light. She lacks the fortitude to deal with the implications of her descent into the chthonic, so she withers and dies.

Alvina's plunge into and return from the Woodhouse nether realm is of an altogether more enabling intensity. A sense of the recognisably 'human' (Alvina and the colliers) is replaced first by the 'animal' (bats), then by the textures and shapes of solid objects. The choking grime of her industrial vicinity – which normally enervates Alvina – is suffused with a shimmering haze of golden radiance. The 'Midlands' against which Richard Lovatt Somers furiously rails in *Kangaroo*, with its 'horrible machine people, these iron and coal people' who 'wanted to set their foot absolutely on life, grind it down, and be master' (*K*, p. 256) is transformed by Alvina, who unlocks the sensuous actualities of a region in which the natural and the artificial ('velvet-pile of gold') coalesce beautifully.

Alvina is a Persephone who, unlike Tess, preserves and nurtures vitality in the underworld, bringing it back to the surface to fashion a dynamic and dazzling new locale. 'Bubbling', 'glancing', 'elevations', 'floating' catches

⁶³ See Morag Shiach, *Modernism, Labour and Selfhood in British Literature and Culture, 1890-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ronald Granofsky, *D. H. Lawrence and Survival: Darwinism in the Fiction of the Transitional Period* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

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the exuberant, pulsating buoyancy in this memorable episode. To the habitually dreary Woodhouse topography Alvina donates a visionary splendour discovered in the drugged captivation of the darkness below. Tess cannot attain the same effect when labouring on Flintcomb-Ash. Alvina's capacity to metamorphose her wintry neighbourhood is a type of quickening, which is apt since her Christian name is related to the Italian *alvo*, designating 'the womb'.

In the next paragraph Lawrence evinces that the colliers are the devitalised and warped descendants of timeless chthonic agencies:

Slaves of the underworld! She watched the swing of the grey colliers along the pavement with a new fascination, hypnotized by a new vision. Slaves – the underground trolls and iron-workers, magic, mischievous, and enslaved, of the ancient stories. But tall – the miners seemed to her to loom tall and grey, in their enslaved magic. Slaves who would cause the superimposed day-order to fall. Not because, individually, they wanted to. But because, collectively, something bubbled up in them, the force of darkness which had no master and no control. It would bubble and stir in them as earthquakes stir the earth. It would be simply disastrous, because it had no master. There was no dark master in the world. The puerile world went on crying out for a new Jesus, another Saviour from the sky, another heavenly superman. When what was wanted was a Dark master from the underworld. (*LG*, p. 48)

The passage is the deadly *reverse* of the creative *obverse* when Alvina emerges from the pit and bequeaths a radical potency to the shabby, unfinished uniformity of her town. Given her own ability to unleash a 'terrible, overwhelming voltaic force, something strange and massive [...] like the strange heaving of an earthquake' (*LG*, p. 38) she now images an apocalyptic eruption of the subjugated underworld force. Eruption seems pertinent here because 'bubbling', a key term in Lawrence's richly textured conception, presages the volcanic lava imagery in Chapter 8 of his Australian novel *Kangaroo*:

[w]e know nothing whatever of the awful forces at work beneath the crust of the earth, and nothing of the internal fires, or that awful subterranean abode where Shelley said 'the old earthquake Demon nurses her young Ruin'. (*K*, p. 168)⁶⁴

Alvina's revelatory vision measures the minutiae of social circumstance against the buried life of subterranean experience.

Lawrence's 'Dark master' (contrasting with Hardy's 'Plutonic master' (*Tess*, pp. 315-16) of the steam-threshing machine), located in a site of intuitive and instinctual wisdom, personifies a subversive element whose tremors threaten to shatter the uncomprehending upper world, the debased

⁶⁴ See Michael Hollington, 'Lawrentian Gothic and "The Uncanny"', *Anglophonia: French Journal of English Studies*, 15 (2004), 171-84.

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'day-order'. This passage shows Alvina in a place of 'gnomes' and 'underground trolls', nimbly shifting emphasis from Classical to Nordic legend and myth. When Alvina travels to Italy, a more unnerving experience of self-dispossession envelops her, without any soothing reference to quaint, fey images of fairytale creatures. Her first subterranean adventure is revised into a more brutal and bruising encounter in the Italian section of *The Lost Girl*; the facile, even companionable gnomes become terrifying Lemures and Furies. Lawrence edges towards an account of the deep flow of passion energy in *Kangaroo*, which signifies there is no single pantheon or existing mythology in which he can house his perceptions, so he is impelled instead to rely on the notion of an ineffable Plutonic dark master.

Alvina's reaction to the grey colliers streaming past her is termed 'nostalgia', which modulates into unconsciously sexual 'craving': 'As it always comes to its children, the nostalgia of the repulsive, heavy-footed Midlands came over her again [...] the [...] dark, inexplicable and yet insatiable craving – as if for an earthquake' (*LG*, p. 48). Lawrence repeats 'nostalgia' once Alvina has settled in Italy: 'The terror, the agony, the nostalgia of the heathen past was a constant torture to her mediumistic soul' (*LG*, p. 315).⁶⁵ 'The all-to-one pattern modern system', Lawrence avows in Chapter 6, 'is too much for most extraordinary individuals. It just kills them off or throws them disused aside' (*LG*, p. 82).

Alvina's capacity to grasp things not with her intellectual faculties, but with her instincts, has outlasted the Midlands' tedium and the imposition of stern rationality. Nevertheless, her intricately refined sensual responsiveness requires the cleansing discomfort of southern Italy, a site sufficiently removed from modern tendencies of mechanical industrialisation in Lawrence's conception. That these traits impair the human gift for potentially joyous, involuntary and unconscious activities of thought is stressed by Lawrence's caustic description of the 'alternative' underworld: James Houghton's 'Pleasure Palace' (*LG*, p. 105), a rickety and primitive picture-house and the last of his breathtakingly botched business ventures.⁶⁶ The nickelodeon vaudeville theatre, featuring both short films and music hall 'turns', is an abortive foray on Houghton's part to replicate for a paying public Alvina's subterranean episode in Throttle-Ha'penny.⁶⁷ The Palace

⁶⁵ See Massako Hirai, 'Forster and Lawrence: The Borderer's Vision of England', *Kobe College Studies*, 38 (1992), 37-52.

⁶⁶ See Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, pp. 78-113; Worthen, 'Recovering *The Lost Girl*', in *D. H. Lawrence in Italy*, ed. by Donaldson and Kalnins.

⁶⁷ See Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 1978); *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure*, ed. by Bailey (London: Open University Books, 1986); Erik Barnoux, *The Magician and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); J. S. Bratton, *Music-Hall: Performance and Style* (London: Open University Books, 1986); *Acts of*

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supplies a shop-soiled and shabby form of ‘darkness’ in which bizarre celluloid ‘visions’ flicker to the clattering accompaniment of a second-rate piano.⁶⁸

Alvina slips away with Miss Poppy’s music-sheets, while Mr May sits down like a professional at the piano and makes things fly for the up-and-down Baxter Bros. Meanwhile, Alvina’s pale face hovering like a ghost in the side-darkness, as it were under the stage.

The lamps go out: gurglings and kissings – and then the dither on the screen: “The Human Bird”, in awful shivery letters. It’s not a very good machine, and Mr May is not a very good operator. Audience distinctly critical. (*LG*, p. 110)⁶⁹

Houghton’s ramshackle picture-house duplicates the mine adventure only in its ‘red-velvet seats’ at the front (*LG*, p. 106): a puckish gesture towards the ‘velvet-pile’ on the surface of Alvina’s underworld (*LG*, pp. 47-48).⁷⁰

Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, ed. by Bratton, Richard Allen Cave, Brendan Gregory, Heidi J. Holder, and Michael Pickering (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); David F. Cheshire, *Music Hall in Britain* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1974); *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. by John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); Eileen and Stephen Yeo, *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1981). By 1913, as Lawrence’s wry account of Houghton’s Pleasure Palace signals, music hall theatre was becoming a vehicle for a new kind of mass entertainment.

⁶⁸ Historians of cinema and vaudeville have contended that this particular vaudeville format played a defining part in establishing cinema as the key entertainment industry of the twentieth century. See also James C. Cowan, ‘Lawrence and the Movies: *The Lost Girl* and After’, *D. H. Lawrence and the Trembling Balance* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), pp. 95-114; Sam Selecki, ‘D. H. Lawrence’s View of Film’, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 1 (1973), 12-16.

⁶⁹ The programme of entertainment Houghton has selected – three short films and two music hall turns – is as historically anachronistic in 1913 as the building itself, a renovated travelling theatre show-house furnished with pews from an early nineteenth-century chapel. The Pleasure Palace’s main rival, the Empire Theatre of Woodhouse, charges higher prices for its middle-class décor and its exclusive showings of films, yet it never fails to attract a strong audience. Houghton’s Pleasure Palace is doomed because the colliers come only if they cannot afford to travel farther or pay more for an evening’s entertainment.

⁷⁰ For notable recent research on modernist writers’ attitudes towards early cinema see Leslie Hankins, “‘Across the Screen of my Brain’: Virginia Woolf’s “Cinema” and Film Forums of the Twenties”, in *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Diane F. Gillespie (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), pp. 149-79; Cheryl Herr, ‘Blue Notes: From Joyce to Jarman’, in *ReJoyce: Text, Culture and Politics*, ed. by John B. Brannigan, Geoff Ward and Julian Wolfreys (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 221-23; Lisa Hotchkiss, ‘Writing the Jump Cut: Mrs. Dalloway in the Context of the Cinema’, in *Virginia Woolf: Texts and Contexts: Selected Papers from the Fifth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Beth Rigel-Daugherty and Eileen Barrett (New York: Pace University Press, 1996), pp. 134-39; Paul Tiessen, ‘Literary Modernism and Cinema’, in *Joyce/Lowry: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Patrick McCarthy and Paul Tiessen (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), pp. 159-76.

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V

The resources of explosive aggression connoted by Lawrence's delineation of the 'Dark master' in Chapter 4 are also found in Francesco Marasca (whose surname means 'bitter cherry' – or to the heroine 'dark poison fruit', evoking the pomegranate seeds given to Persephone). Ciccio is a member of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras, a group of continental troupers, and functions in the intricate schema of the novel as Pluto to Alvina's Persephone. This strand of analogy is complicated by Lawrence's dogged refusal to be confined within the limits of a single myth. Ciccio's physical attributes signify not only Pluto, but also Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, agriculture, and corn (the Roman Bacchus), associated with the underworld. According to Frazer,

Dionysus was believed to have died a violent death, but to have been brought back to life again; and his sufferings, death, and resurrection were enacted in his sacred rites. His tragic story is thus told by the poet Nonnus. Zeus in the form of a serpent visited Persephone, and she bore him Zagreus, that is, Dionysus, a horned infant. (*GB*, p. 397)

Dionysus, whose 'tragic story' reflected the yearly dissolution and renewal of vegetation, was a late addition to the rites of Demeter. Lawrence discloses Ciccio's ambiguous primitive passion by repeatedly comparing him to animals:

He was a potent, glamorous presence, people turned to watch him. There was a certain dark, leopard-like pride in the air about him, something that the English people watched. (*LG*, p. 289)

His eyes kept hers. Curious how *dark* they seemed, with only a yellow ring of pupil. He was looking right into her, beyond her usual self, impersonal [...] She was afraid of his long, cat-like look. (*LG*, p. 173)

There was a sort of *finesse* about his face. His skin was delicately tawny and slightly lustrous. The eyes were set in so dark, that one expected them to be black and flashing. And then one met the yellow pupils, sulphurous and remote. It was like meeting a lion. His long, fine nose, his rather long, rounded chin and curling lips seemed refined through ages of forgotten culture. (*LG*, p. 160)

His eyes watched her as a cat watches a bird, but without the white gleam of ferocity. In his eyes was a deep, deep, sun-warmth, something fathomless, deepening black and abysmal. (*LG*, p. 211)

'A feature in the mythical character of Dionysus', Frazer explains, 'which at first sight appears inconsistent with his nature as a deity of vegetation, is that he was often [...] represented in animal shape' (*GB*, p. 399). The Italian's inscrutable black eyes denote cruel remoteness, furtive guile and

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predatory acquisitiveness.⁷¹ In his rare appearances in Greek art, Hades is often pictured with an averted face, implying he was not to be looked at directly. Ciccio is feline: he possesses the sensuous beauty of the cat as well as its stealthy grace and independent nature.⁷² Lawrence indicates the gulf between fantasies of eroticised submission to the greater soul of a heroic male and the humdrum facts of Ciccio's quotidian routine. He is treated like a traditional vagabond among the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras troupe and his role in the elaborate ceremonial dance with Kishwegin (*LG*, p. 141) is that of torturer and killer,⁷³ reminding us, as Marilyn Papayanis contends, that 'atavism threatens at any moment to devolve into play or performance to be terminated at the will of the player'.⁷⁴

Mrs Tuke regards Ciccio's fierce gusto as a subjugating force: "'Why not be atavistic if you *can* be, and follow at a man's heel just because he's a man. Be like barbarous women, a slave'" (*LG*, p. 286). Alvina, whose sober reasoning faculty cannot help but nervously scrutinise her own non-rational drives, broods over Mrs Tuke's words: '[w]as it atavism, this sinking into extinction under the spell of Ciccio? Was it atavism, this strange, sleep-like submission to his being? [...] Would she ever wake out of her dark, warm coma?' (*LG*, p. 288)⁷⁵ Her self-questioning implies an ambivalently fashioned atavism. However much instinctual and passional excess is privileged by Mrs Tuke, *The Lost Girl* attests that Alvina's attraction to the 'spell' of atavism carries her to the brink of psychic dissolution (though this might seem pleasurable initially), and profoundly threatens her yearning to be viewed as an active subject in her own right.

⁷¹ Alvina's passion for Ciccio is reminiscent of Yvette in *The Virgin and the Gipsy*: '[o]f all the men she had ever seen, this one was the only one who was stronger than she was, in her own kind of strength, her own kind of understanding'. See *The Virgin and the Gipsy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 32-33.

⁷² See Nandita Batra, "'The Only Animal to Fear': Fables of Sexuality and Aggression in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*", *Bestia: Yearbook of the Beast Fable Society*, 9 (2002-2003), 89-99.

⁷³ See Elgin W. Mellow, 'Music and Dance in D. H. Lawrence', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 21 (1997), 49-60.

⁷⁴ Papayanis, 'Italy's Best Gift', p. 306.

⁷⁵ Alvina's questioning about submission and maternal drives foreshadows Vita Sackville-West's novel, *All Passion Spent* (1931). Maternal thinking can have a beauty of its own but the cost to the individual woman is too high for Lady Slane: '[w]as there, after all, some foundation for the prevalent belief that woman should minister to man? [...] Was there something beautiful, something creative, even, in her apparent submission to Henry? [...] Was not this also an achievement of the sort peculiarly suited to women? Of the sort, indeed, which women alone could compass; a privilege, a prerogative, not to be despised? All the woman in her answered, yes! All the artist in her countered, no!' See Vita Sackville-West, *All Passion Spent* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 176.

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Even as *The Lost Girl* insists on Ciccio's primal verve, his ostensibly insolent and wilful temperament is complicated by the novel's celebration of his subtle, sinewy, flower-like embodiment of southern Italy's seductive charm, 'extraordinarily velvety and alive' (LG, p. 140). Even wearing his 'terrifying war-paint' for the pre-show procession, he is 'like a flower on its stem' (LG, p. 141). Alvina first notices his 'long, beautiful lashes' (LG, p. 125), 'slender wrists' (LG, p. 128) and 'frail-seeming hands' (LG, p. 129). Even the muscularity of his frame seems 'velvety, suave' and 'softly powerful' (LG, p. 161). At her most compliant moments, it is Ciccio's 'lustrous dark beauty' that enthralls Alvina (LG, p. 202). Despite the male chauvinism of his opinions, Ciccio is more like one of the flowers Persephone stoops to pick prior to her abduction in the meadow than he is like a bullying and boorish patriarch. It is quiet recognition of his 'passional vulnerability' that moves Alvina to devotion (LG, p. 291) when she notices that 'his face was open like a flower right to the depths of his soul, a dark, lovely translucency, vulnerable to the deep quick of his soul' (LG, p. 291). The images of fluid darkness, sacrificial agony and dependence connected with Alvina's revelatory vision during and immediately after her visit to the coalmine are reiterated when she succumbs to Ciccio in a mystical rape that is at once actual and elusively metaphorical. The terms of simple seduction and normative romantic intercourse fail to reflect the violent rupture implicit in this encounter. Lawrence reinvents the abduction of Persephone through the rhetoric of the exotic sublime. Ciccio's 'powerful, mysterious, horrible' potency is redolent of that Burkean 'terror' which 'crushes us into admiring submission', resembling 'a coercive rather than a consensual power, engaging our respect but not, as with beauty, our love'.⁷⁶

The sense of the unknown beauty of him weighed her down like some force. If for one moment she could have escaped from that black spell of his beauty, she would have been free. If only she could, for one second, have seen him ugly, he would not have killed her and made her his slave as he did. But the spell was on her, of his darkness [...] And he killed her. He simply took her and assassinated her. How she suffered no one can tell. Yet all this time, this lustrous dark beauty, unbearable. (LG, p. 202)

⁷⁶ See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 54. Lawrence's conception of the English daylight world immersed in the darker Italian consciousness is suggested by the title of his 1916 book of travel essays, *Twilight in Italy*. Far from entailing loss of anything valuable, such an experience would supply 'the ecstasy of light and dark together, the supreme transcendence of the afterglow, day hovering in the embrace of the coming night like two angels embracing in the heavens, like Eurydice in the arms of Orpheus, or Persephone embraced by Pluto'. See D. H. Lawrence, *Twilight in Italy*, in *D. H. Lawrence and Italy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 45.

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In Chapter 4, Alvina had construed the colliers as ‘slaves of the underworld [...] tall and grey in their enslaved magic’ (*LG*, p. 47); now she realises the Italian intended her to be ‘his slave’ (*LG*, p. 203).⁷⁷ While she has by no means been raped, she is placed in this extreme position by her helpless erotic attachment to Ciccio,⁷⁸ and her subjugation in other areas of life is distinctly forced upon her. The final sentences move seamlessly into Alvina’s perspective to signal the bewilderment of her visionary state, which maintains a delicate equipoise between the sumptuously productive and sharply destructive. ‘Black spell’ recalls Alvina’s ‘Egyptian tomb’ episode in Throttle-Ha’penny, and augurs the ‘downslope into Orcus’ that Somers craves in *Kangaroo*, that ‘sacred darkness, where one was enveloped into the greater god as in an Egyptian darkness. He would meet there or nowhere’ (*K*, p. 143).⁷⁹ The seismic intensity of these subterranean settings Lawrence transfers to Ciccio; but his elliptical presence is even more destabilising – Alvina is subjected to, and surreptitiously relishes, unsympathetic sexual behaviour. As the latent savagery of the scene suggests, Alvina is reunited with a stronger flow of creative death than she felt in the mine. Lawrence’s version of Persephone’s ravishment attaches more significance to its vivid religious meaning than to any fraught social debates about the bleak implications of abduction and forced submission. Alvina is repeatedly delineated as ‘pale’ because she has been drained of sensual substance by a sinister over-world civilisation. Her bodiless spirituality may not be intrinsic but simply an index of a grotesquely unbalanced social code. Such a modern woman, according to *The Lost Girl*, has access to earthy ties through Ciccio, her Plutonic opposite, who rescues Alvina from the glaring light and assimilates her into his own arena of restorative and ‘lustrous dark beauty’

⁷⁷ Madame warns Alvina of Ciccio’s underworld power in Chapter 9: “‘I know something of these Italian men, who are labourers in every country [...] He will want to rise, by you, and you will go down, with him [...] In the first place you are English, and he thinks to rise by that. [...] Or he will draw you down, down – Yes, one or another’” (*LG*, pp. 180-81).

⁷⁸ Hilary Simpson, despite finding the novel promising in its opening phase, especially its portrait of a woman’s rebellion against convention, argues ‘[t]he particular form of mating that Lawrence eventually envisages for Alvina, with its insistent emphasis on submission and passivity, is a product of his post-war thinking and his growing anti-feminism’. See *D.H. Lawrence and Feminism* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 78. Sheila Macleod avers that Alvina, in yielding to Ciccio and going with him to Italy, shirks ‘the burden of self-responsibility [...] if all Lawrence’s heroines were Alvinas, we should not still be reading his novels today’. See *Lawrence’s Men and Women: A Post-Feminist Look* (London: Flamingo, 1985), p. 93.

⁷⁹ Orcus, sometimes represented as Pluto, presided over death and the underworld.

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(LG, p. 202). This union, Lawrence signifies, is a psychic drama in which the two need each other for wholeness.⁸⁰

VI

In the poem 'Autumn Sunshine' (revised version of 1918), Lawrence refers to 'heaven's pale wine' that is paradoxically distilled by Persephone in 'the hell-queen's cup', thus illustrating a necessary interdependence between the goddess of daylight and Pluto/Dis.⁸¹ The extended importance of these deities, then, gives them a metaphysical dimension beyond the psychological in *The Lost Girl*. Perhaps Lawrence's most moving poetic use of the deities emerged when he was dying of tuberculosis at age forty-four. While he was ill at a temporary residence in Bavaria, he happened to see flowers – the Bavarian gentians of his poem of that name – and he imagined holding them, as Persephone herself might, as a brilliant torch, a talisman, a symbol of life merging almost imperceptibly with death:

let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of this flower
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness,
even where Persephone goes, just now, from the frosted September
to the sightless realm [...]

of the arms Plutonic, and pierced with the passion of dense gloom,
among the splendours of torches of darkness, shedding darkness on
the lost bride and her groom.⁸²

This Persephone may be half of a psychic unity – the light (as conscious mind) embracing deep, dark colour (as unconscious sensuality). But the two mythic figures (Persephone and Pluto) are also respectively, soul and body in the final convergence of life with death.⁸³ Lawrence's image of the 'lost bride' as a harbinger of immortality owes something to Gilbert Murray's association of Persephone with 'the old liturgy of the dying and re-risen year-bride' and his description of her as a 'home-coming Bride' after her ordeal in the earth, for Lawrence had scrutinised Murray's *Four Stages of Greek*

⁸⁰ See Leo J. Dorbad, *Sexually Balanced Relationships in the Novels of D. H. Lawrence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991); Paul Poplawski, *Promptings of Desire: Creativity and the Religious Impulse in the Works of D. H. Lawrence* (Westport: Greenwood, 1993).

⁸¹ See D. H. Lawrence, *Complete Poems*, ed. by Vivian De Sola Pinto and F. Warren Roberts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 177.

⁸² Lawrence, *Complete Poems*, p. 697.

⁸³ Janice H. Harris, 'Sexual Antagonism in D. H. Lawrence's Early Leadership Fiction', *Modern Language Studies*, 7 (1977), 43-52; Patricia L. Hagen, 'The Metaphoric Foundations of Lawrence's "Dark Knowledge"', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 29 (1987), 365-76.

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Religion in 1916. While this passage may hint at ancient rites of human sacrifice (and Lawrence certainly knew of such rites from Frazer's *Golden Bough*), it also points to the truth of the earth's perennial rejuvenation (as manifested by the gentians) and thus to the hope of human immortality. One of Lawrence's major sources on mythology, Jane Harrison, had proposed that, in contrast to Demeter, Persephone 'withdraws herself more and more to [...] the things below and beyond' (*PGR*, p. 276). If Persephone is the Queen of Death who had become the giver of life in Lawrence's poem, we look beyond the nuptials of Persephone and Pluto to her triumph over death. Three torches or 'flames', common on the goddess's sacred monuments are among the symbols of immortality in the poem's little-noticed final draft. The 'wedding-guest' (evidently the poet) will carry 'a flower [...] and three dark flames' to 'the marriage of the living dark'. In Lawrence's version, the deathly-lost bride is paradoxically obliterated and vitalised at the same time by contact with Pluto/Dis; indeed, this descent is a prelude to the grand design of rebirth.

However, *The Lost Girl* modifies this structure by depicting Alvina's devotion to Ciccio as an uneasy mixture of aesthetic admiration and half-willing capitulation. Alvina remakes Ciccio as an impersonal force of nature, exploiting him as the means by which she buttresses her own autonomous and idiosyncratic perspective. Despite his apparent domination of Alvina, it is the Italian who ceases to exist for her as a discrete entity. In Ciccio's embrace,

she was alone, and she did not mind being alone. It was all she wanted. In the passion of her lover she had found a loneliness, beautiful, cool, like a shadow she wrapped round herself [...] It was a moment of stillness and completeness. (*LG*, p. 334)

Neither lover is able, or prepared, to apprehend fully the other as a sophisticated and complex subject; though the 'beautiful' *shadow* of 'loneliness' which envelops Alvina after the union with Ciccio is portentous given how drastically her status alters upon arriving in Italy. She feels her legal and personal privileges dissipate as officials 'scrutinised her, and asked questions of Ciccio. Nobody asked her anything – she might have been Ciccio's shadow' (*LG*, p. 295).

Alvina's commitment to Ciccio's chthonic aura is more problematic than the abduction of Tess/Persephone in Hardy's novel. Alec cynically takes advantage of Tess then spurns her; Ciccio is the instrument of Alvina's resurgence, releasing her from a staid bourgeois life that negates passion and

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the unfettered expression of individual imagination.⁸⁴ The initial sexual encounter between Alvina and Ciccio raises a tricky question posed by the Persephone myth in Lawrence's fiction overall. Its most vicious components, from the rape narrative, appear with especial starkness in 'The Princess', in which the title character, after going voluntarily with her Mexican guide into an austere mountain region, is held there against her will in a cold, dark cabin and repeatedly subjected to sex acts that she has initiated but later tried to repulse. However much she may seek sensual fulfilment, she does not achieve it from this sustained assault by a would-be Plutonic man, and he, profoundly death-committed is the one who loses his life.

Though Lawrence signals Alvina's 'abduction' as a mixed blessing given that she is saved from emotional death-in-life by a partner who balances out her own traits, this is not a consistent strategy in his fiction. In Lawrence's debut novel *The White Peacock* (1911), Lettie and George clearly need each other but Lettie aspires to move 'upward' through the social hierarchy into what she deems more rarefied and elegant social surroundings, not downward into the vivid immediacy of George's farm life, and she is thus sardonically termed 'Persephone': 'Lettie was on in front, flitting darkly across the field, bending over the flowers, stooping to the earth like a sable Persephone come into freedom'.⁸⁵ Another 'Proserpine' in the same novel is, on the other hand, no socially mobile and emotionally complex modern young woman like Alvina, but a 'big, prolific woman' (WP, p. 135), a coarse matron favoured by her gamekeeper husband over the patrician 'peacock' who had once toyed with the idea of marrying him. The opposites so strikingly elaborated in *The Lost Girl* singularly fail to harmonise or dovetail in *The White Peacock*. In his edgier, more strident portraits of the Persephone and Pluto figures in his fiction, Lawrence denotes how the marriage of opposites can trigger more instability and dissension than overall benefit.⁸⁶ So in *Sons and Lovers* (1913), the mother Gertrude Morel proudly polices the outskirts of what she regards as the refined standards and protocol of 'enlightened' culture, which merely goads the father Walter Morel to ever more savage hostility after labouring manually all day in the dank 'underworld' of the Bestwood mines.

⁸⁴ See Anne E. Fernald, "'Out of It': Alienation and Coercion in D. H. Lawrence', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 49 (2003), 183-203; James C. Cowan, *D. H. Lawrence: Self and Sexuality* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002).

⁸⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *The White Peacock*, ed. by Andrew Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 173. Hereafter referred to as WP.

⁸⁶ Several later Lawrence characters identified with Persephone include Dolly in 'The Princess' (1924), Kate in *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), and the virgin in *The Virgin and the Gypsy* (1930). Pluto's Hades is pervasive in the 1924 poetry collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* and there are allusions to Persephone in *The Ladybird*.

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The First Lady Chatterley (written in 1926) delineates the alternatives posed by Lawrence's version of the Persephone myth. Connie Chatterley, who explicitly associates herself with Persephone, contrasts her philosophical Plato-quoting husband with her lover, the potent gamekeeper: '[a]nd she was an escaping Persephone, Proserpine. Well, she'd rather be married to Pluto than Plato'. As in the standard *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), her flight is from the calculated nihilism of a post-war milieu with Sir Clifford to the woods where she experiences, with Parkin, instinctive tenderness for all living things and her own rehabilitation through sexuality.

Connie's story deals with only part of the mythical framework, avoiding abduction and rape altogether and securing her niche within the lush contours of a natural domain rather than wrenching her away from it.⁸⁷ But even this idyllic version of a liberated Persephone is ambiguous: despite sincere, deeply felt desire for the gamekeeper's less polished lifestyle, Connie cannot really exorcise 'Plato' from her own consciousness: she still wishes 'to know' more by consulting the socially privileged arena of cultural improvement – 'to read Swinburne again'.⁸⁸ Not even in the last *Lady Chatterley* is it certain that the opposites, though less radical there, can meet in any untroubled rapprochement. The first version's explicit allusions to Plato underline a theme continued in the essay 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', which blames classical and Christian idealism alike for the eventual grotesque imbalance in Western thought. Here Lawrence situates the ancient Persephone, Demeter, and Pluto in a vexed interrelationship with each other: hence the necessity for individuals to confront, resuscitate and personify such gods again. The lesson is pre-eminently for Connie: although the mental, socially constructed self is not one's essence, its meshes are unavoidable. Yet an escape plan is essential, as Lawrence proclaims in *The Lost Girl*, though he does not mask the fact that Alvina's flight is to an Italian heart of darkness, ironically decentred in 'a wild centre of an old, unfinished little mountain town' (*LG*, p. 304).

With regard to Ciccio's Plutonic power, Lawrence deliberately makes it difficult to distinguish between the darkness that is a plentiful source of regeneration in the novel, and the darkness of merciless annihilation.⁸⁹ If Ciccio fulfils some of these roles ascribed to Pluto/Dis in *The Lost Girl*, then we have to accept that although an exotic animal in England by virtue of being a southerner, Ciccio is just an extraneous atom in his own remotely situated community. His 'terrible' passion provides for emotional rebirth, yet

⁸⁷ See Allison Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸⁸ Earl G. Ingersoll, *D. H. Lawrence, Desire, and Narrative* (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 2001), furnishes a different, though astute account of some of these issues.

⁸⁹ See also Jack Stewart, 'Lawrence and the Creative Process', *Style*, 37 (2003), 160-76.

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even this salvation is signalled with sustained ambiguity. At her new home in the Abruzzi Mountains, Alvina is challenged by more terrifying currents of primeval activity than she could ever envisage in the bowels of the English soil.⁹⁰

Life with Ciccio means loss of caste, months of solitariness, the penury and degradation of peasant Italy; under Italian marriage law Alvina effectively becomes her husband's property. She is distinctly subjugated: Ciccio and one of his male relatives seem to be 'threatening her with surveillance and subjection' (*LG*, p. 329). His relatives will not even mention to a woman the religious topics and political controversies that would regularly feature in Alvina's conversations with her more cultivated English coterie. In spite of this dismissive treatment, she is, paradoxically, almost revered as a radiant opposite to the surly, taciturn men of her new home who see in her 'a fairness, a luminousness' of soul, 'something free, touched with divinity' (*LG*, p. 325). This divinity, Lawrence implies, is that of the daylight Persephone, however attenuated in her straitened circumstances after leaving England.

VII

In Chapter 15, 'The Journey Across', Alvina watches her homeland disappear into the sea like a slowly sinking coffin:

England, beyond the water, rising with ash-grey, corpse-grey cliffs, and streaks of snow on the downs above. England, like a long, ash-grey coffin slowly submerging. She watched it, fascinated and terrified. It seemed to repudiate the sunshine, to remain unilluminated, long and ash-grey and dead, with streaks of snow like cerements. That was England! Her thoughts flew to Woodhouse, the grey centre of it all. (*LG*, p. 294)⁹¹

The passage supplies the sharpest contrast to the shimmering vision of Woodhouse after Alvina's emergence from the pit: '[w]hat a strange and lovely place, bubbling iridescent-golden [...] a velvet surface of golden light' (*LG*, pp. 64-65). The colourful, living landscape in Chapter 4 is now moribund, dismal and ash-grey, repudiating 'the sunshine, to remain

⁹⁰ See Papayanis, 'Italy's Best Gift', 295-303.

⁹¹ The 'Nightmare' chapter in *Kangaroo* also delineates England as a place devoid of sunlight. From the boat Richard Lovatt Somers looks back at the snow-covered cliffs of Kent and sees his homeland 'like a grey, dreary-grey coffin sinking in the sea behind, with her dead grey cliffs' (*K*, p. 258).

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unilluminated' (*LG*, p. 329).⁹² Alvina, like her creator, disavows the real and symbolic Old Country, disenchanted by its dour constrictions, for a supposedly undefiled land. Lawrence does not glibly sentimentalise the region to which Alvina is transported by her spouse. Ciccio's country exudes not so much a rarefied foreign charm as a ragged poverty: it is no sun-drenched idyll of the Romantic imagination, but a raw, squalid, and unfinished outpost that elicits from Alvina an appalled fascination at its profound alterity.⁹³

Approaching Italy in the train, Alvina registers 'vaster influences spreading around, the Past was greater, more magnificent [...] For the first time the nostalgia of the vast Roman and classic world took possession of her' (*LG*, p. 297).⁹⁴ Alvina almost literally goes off the map by living in the tiny hamlet of Califano, but she initially hopes that her flight from England will be a straightforward liberation to a more authentic life of primitive simplicity and natural instinct. For her, Italy manifests both the largely unmapped hinterland of the psyche, and a terrestrial New World of reborn possibilities, as it does for Aaron Sisson in Lawrence's next published novel. Gazing out at the Alps he feels as if

On the other side of the time barrier. His old sleepy English nature was startled in its sleep. He felt like a man who knows it is time to wake up, and who doesn't want to wake up, to face the responsibility of another sort of day. To open his darkest eyes and wake up to a new responsibility. Wake up and enter on the responsibility of a new self in himself. [...] It was so hateful to have to get a new grip on his bowels, a new hard recklessness into his heart, a new and responsible consciousness into his mind and soul.⁹⁵

Although Aaron Sisson has abandoned his wife and children, as well as the Protestant egalitarianism of 'the North', Lawrence's stress on Aaron's 'responsibility' carries little trace of sarcastic irony. Aaron has a border experience in which the shackles of the *mother culture* are loosened, the

⁹² See Barry J. Scherr, *D. H. Lawrence Today: Literature, Culture, Politics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

⁹³ See also Jack Stewart, 'Lawrence's Ontological Vision in *Etruscan Places*, *The Escaped Cock*, and *Apocalypse*', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 31 (2003), 43-58; Jeffrey J. Folks, 'Mediterranean Travel Writing: From *Etruscan Places* to *Under the Tuscan Sun*', *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, 40 (2004), 102-12; Stefania Michelucci, 'L'Espace Perdu: D. H. Lawrence's Travel Writings', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 8 (2004), 35-48; Stewart, 'Lawrence's Peasant Portraits in *Twilight in Italy*', *Studies in the Humanities*, 25 (1998), 24-37.

⁹⁴ See Robert Burden, 'Parody, Stylization, and Dialogics: A Bakhtinian Reading of *The Lost Girl*', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 30 (3) (2002), 35-40; Jae-Kyung Koh, 'D. H. Lawrence and the Great War', *Neophilologus*, 87 (1) (January 2003), 153-70; Patrick McHugh, 'Metaphysics and Sexual Politics in Lawrence's Novels', *College Literature*, 20 (2) (June 1993), 83-97.

⁹⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod*, p. 151.

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lineaments of his caste briefly forgotten; he senses a greater duty of care towards himself, denying communitarian ideals so as to inaugurate a solitary quest for spiritual salvation. Ambling through the streets of Novara, he

surprised himself in his gallant feeling of liberty: a feeling of bravado and almost swaggering carelessness which is Italy's best gift to an Englishman. He had crossed the dividing line, and the values of life, though ostensibly and verbally the same, were dynamically different.⁹⁶

The unapologetic misogyny of this pilgrim's progress, which equates the female with the suffocations of bourgeois matrimony and domesticity from which Aaron flees, recalls Forster's *The Longest Journey*. Lawrence's language of sleeping and waking captures the deadening somnolent trance that Woodhouse once induced in Alvina, versus the heightened sensations that her exhilarated flight to Italy seems to portend.

A touristic tweeness and an expectation of the pleasures accruing to nomadic free play typify Alvina's initial rapt responses, of which she is quickly disabused by the tough peasant life awaiting her. Her deep fear of dislocation is enacted by the fraught repetition of the word 'lost', like the blows of a blunt instrument, as she struggles to find her bearings in a locale impervious to modes of normative discourse and instrumental reason: 'Overhead she saw the brilliance of Orion. She felt she was quite, quite lost. She had gone out of the world, over the border, into some place of mystery. She was lost to Woodhouse, to Lancaster, to England – all lost' (*LG*, p. 306). She feels vulnerable in 'the darkness of the savage little mountain town' (*LG*, p. 305), whose material scarcities and chill interiors is the very antithesis of Woodhouse's solid bourgeois furnishings:

Alvina looked at the room. There was a wooden settle in front of the hearth, recessed window, on whose sloping ledge were newspapers, scattered letters, nails and a hammer. On the table were dried beans and two maize cobs. (*LG*, p. 310)

In Ciccio she locates a measure of physical warmth that only serves to exacerbate her expatriate disillusionment: 'his power and his warmth invade her and extinguish her' (*LG*, p. 313). The Italian hill-peasants on the edges of the Abruzzi are 'watchful, venomous, dangerous' (*LG*, p. 324); and Alvina,

⁹⁶ D. H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod*, p. 152. The novel frequently reminds the reader how brittle is Aaron's soaring vision of Italian plenitude: 'the verbal and the ostensible, the accursed mechanical ideal gains day by day over the spontaneous life-dynamic, so that Italy becomes as idea-bound and as automatic as England: just a business proposition' (p. 152).

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to survive, 'must avoid the *inside* of it' (*LG*, p. 325), just as she avoided being ensnared by the prudish Victorian-English centre of Woodhouse.⁹⁷

Lawrence's travel-writing offers clues about why Italy has such a profound symbolic meaning for Alvina:

One begins to realise how old the real Italy is [...] Life is so primitive, so pagan, so strangely heathen and half-savage [...] Wherever one is in Italy, either one is conscious of the present, or of the medieval influences, or of the far, mysterious gods of the early Mediterranean. Wherever one is, the place has its conscious genius [...] The expression may be Proserpine, or Pan, or even the strange 'shrouded gods' of the Etruscans.⁹⁸

In Italy the ancient gods, including those elusive of exact identification, are felt to be very much alive, and the past bears down heavily on the present.⁹⁹ 'To *penetrate* into Italy', Lawrence explains,

is like a most fascinating act of self-discovery – back, back down the old ways of time. Strange and wonderful chords awake in us, and vibrate again after many hundreds of years of complete forgetfulness.¹⁰⁰

Alvina's journey, part spiritual and part sexual, is towards the excavation of the pagan elements within, an exposure of unconscious 'chords'. The arid grandeur of the region to which she is brought is to her both bewitching and deeply distressing. Terror need not exclude the beatific: 'she was [...] stunned with the strangeness of it all: startled, half-enraptured with the terrific beauty of the place, half-horrified by its savage annihilation of her' (*LG*, p. 314).¹⁰¹

This is forcefully illustrated when, on the Sunday before Christmas, Alvina and Ciccio go to the village of Pescocalascio for the first time (*LG*, p. 327) and she understands how limited her movements will be, how she can never visit the village alone to collect her groceries. Feeling 'the oriental idea

⁹⁷ The eponymous hero of Aaron's *Rod* also registers the bitter difference between the idealised Italian exotic of his imaginings and the actual peasant who steals his seat in a third-class train compartment: '[t]here was something insolent and unbearable about the look – and about the rocky fixity of the large man [...] a solid rock-like impudence, before which an Englishman quails: a jeering, immovable insolence, with a sneer round the nose and a solid-seated posterior' (p. 201). Aaron's outraged sense of English superiority necessitates that he convert the Italian son of the soil into a crude, inorganic thing.

⁹⁸ D. H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 130-31. See Jack Stewart, 'Metaphor and Metonymy, Colour and Space, in Lawrence's *Sea and Sardinia*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 41 (1995), 208-23.

⁹⁹ See Takeo Iida, 'Lawrence's Pagan Gods and Christianity', *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 23 (1991), 179-90.

¹⁰⁰ D. H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 131.

¹⁰¹ See Donald Gutierrez, 'D. H. Lawrence's "Spirit of Place" as Eco-Monism', *D. H. Lawrence: The Journal of the D. H. Lawrence Society*, (1991), 39-51.

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of women, which still leaves its mark on the Mediterranean', and listening to Ciccio gossiping with other men about encroaching war, she rises and says 'I want to go into the sun' (*LG*, p. 329). From that point on, she exists more and more outdoors among the blossoming flowers that Lawrence delineates in the mountains from January to May – the goddess returning to the sun and the surface-world after the shortest day of the earth. This evokes H.D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision*, an aphoristic meditation written in 1919 in the immediate aftermath of her 'great-war' catastrophes, as a kind of self-consolation, for this necessary 'descent' as language, agency, and identity are menaced with nullification. The essay posits that if one embraces physical and spiritual desire, one also accepts pain and death. H.D. takes account of the chthonic dimension of the gods themselves:

Zeus Endendros – God in a tree; Dionysus Anthios, God in a flower; Zeus Melios, God in the black earth, death, disruption, disintegration; Dionysius Zagreus, the flower torn, broken by chemical process of death, vein, leaf, texture – white luminous lily surface, veined with black – white lily flesh bruised, withered.¹⁰²

These epithets of the gods give figures for the process of life itself, having intrinsically both a vital and a disintegrative aspect, which resonates with Alvina's experiences of a 'wild and desolate' southern Italy. H.D.'s 'black' gods, like Lawrence's 'dark' deities are master tropes for the crude necessities of bodily, erotic, and spiritual existence.¹⁰³ As signs of necessity, they take on the dual aspect that Harrison investigates: while they confer their gifts, they at the same time compel wounding initiation and unstinting service.

Alvina's initiation into her husband's disordered village is much crueller than the darker side of her overwhelming experience in the English coalmine: the essentially Protestant rational self at the core of modern individualism is exposed as a meaningless mask by the daily deprivations and 'inferior savagery' (*LG*, p. 319) of Italian peasant culture: she deplores the 'haphazard, useless way of Italians all day long, getting nothing done' (*LG*, p. 317).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² H.D., *Notes on Thought and Vision & The Wise Sappho* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1982), p. 32. That H.D. here chooses Zeus and Dionysos-Zagreus is not accidental; she thus acknowledges a traditional identification of the two. Both have the titles of Melichios and Chthonios, and they form part of a triad with Hades, as the 'great god' who is also the 'black' god of the underworld.

¹⁰³ See David Ellis, 'D. H. Lawrence and the Female Body', *Essays in Criticism*, 46 (1996), 136–52.

¹⁰⁴ Alvina begins to realise that even her new husband's conception of 'home' – essentially public and pre-modern – is radically different from her own bourgeois domestic training. It is Ciccio's failure to indulge Alvina's need for a truly shared domestic space, rather than his denial of her rational self, that depresses her: 'Ciccio's home would never be his castle. His castle was the piazza of Pescocalascio. His home was nothing to him but a possession, and a hole to sleep in. He didn't live in it. He lived in the open air, and in the community. When the true Italian

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Throttle-Ha'penny displayed the colliers as stolid, stoical victims; now Alvina becomes the victim, her newly stimulated senses scalded by elementary potencies that target the deepest ground of her being:

[t]here is no mistake about it. Alvina was a lost girl. She was cut off from everything she belonged to. Ovid isolated in Thrace might well lament. The soul itself needs its own mysterious nourishment. This nourishment lacking, nothing is well. At Pescocalascio it was the mysterious influence of the mountains and valleys themselves which seemed always to be annihilating the Englishwoman. (*LG*, p. 314)

Her existence shifts profoundly from the rigours of high-mindedness to the bruising vitality of spontaneous communion with the cosmos. This metamorphosis is signalled in the verbal texture of the novel, which begins as a carefully calibrated study of manners reminiscent of Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns*, and ends teetering on the brink of lurid gothic melodrama.

In Chapter 15, Alvina undergoes a self-dismantling as she witnesses 'the grand pagan twilight of the valleys, savage, cold, with a sense of ancient gods who knew the right for human sacrifice'. From being a proud subject and mistress of her own words and deeds in Woodhouse, she is now utterly beleaguered – a complex reversal of the relationship between the questing self and the locus of displacement upon which the expatriate adventure is founded:

It stole away the soul of Alvina. She felt transfigured in it, clairvoyant in another mystery of life. A savage hardness came in her heart. The gods who had demanded human sacrifice were quite right, immutably right. The fierce, savage gods who dipped their lips in blood, these were the true gods. (*LG*, p. 315)

In Hardy's *Tess* by contrast, the protagonist's individual moment of 'transfiguration' during the baptism of Sorrow does not leave behind a sense of initiation into savage experience, or with any striking impression of busy psychic activity. Lawrence's Alvina *feels herself* 'transfigured' in this enchanted vicinity of the sublime, irradiated even in her dark moments of existential anguish, on the cusp of spiritual self-sacrifice as bracing as it is excoriating. '[C]lairvoyant in another mystery of life', Alvina apprehends the secret stirrings of a pantheistic domain:

came out in him, his veriest home was the piazza of Pescocalascio, the little sort of market-place where the roads met in the village, under the castle, and where the men stood in groups and talked, talked, talked. This was where Ciccio belonged: his active mindful self. His active, mindful self was none of hers. She only had his passive self, and his family passion. His masculine mind and intelligence had its home in the little public square of his village' (*LG*, p. 330).

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the real breathing presence of the upper snows. And a wild, terrible happiness would take hold of her, beyond despair, but very like despair. No one would ever find her. She had gone beyond the world into the pre-world, she had reopened on the old eternity. (LG, p. 316).

Lawrence's account gains special force from the context of the Great War against which it is played. Ciccio is called up to serve in the Italian army at the finale, leaving Alvina with grave doubts about her future. The Great War touches, and is touched by, every reference to human sacrifice, annihilation and the spellbinding but merciless chthonic divinities in *The Lost Girl*. What is most arresting about the later chapters is how the Persephone myth connects with this cataclysmic event. The maiden goddess was understood to symbolise the seed corn that must descend into the earth so that from apparent desiccation new life may germinate. The Italian section of *The Lost Girl* enables Lawrence to move beyond any superficial use of a sentimentally encouraging myth, just as Alvina goes 'beyond' into 'the pre-world'. The nickname that Ciccio gives to Alvina – 'Allaye' which connotes several slang words for the female genitalia – acquires additional import given that she regards herself 'like one of the old sacred prostitutes' (LG, p. 288). This invokes the pregnant Mrs Tuke's earlier reproach to her: 'life is a mass of unintelligent forces to which intelligent human beings are submitted. Prostituted' (LG, p. 283). These are the implications to Alvina of unconsciously adopting the 'fierce gods' as she endures the casual 'assassination' inflicted by Ciccio. The gods who demand human sacrifice, who dip 'their lips in blood', are to her now 'immutably right' (LG, p. 315).

Human sacrifice of one kind or another occurs in Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent* and 'The Woman Who Rode Away'.¹⁰⁵ Yet Alvina's experience is unusual. That the Great War should be endorsed as a *necessary* apocalypse from which a new order may emerge resplendent is not perhaps Lawrence's explicit intention. However, in Chapter 14, the England Alvina disavows is likened to a 'long, ash-grey coffin, *winter*, slowly submerging in the seas' (My emphasis). Lawrence may have been anxious that his robustly unsentimental Persephone myth was open to misinterpretation. Alvina, living in an 'isolate' condition of wonder, imagines what it would be like to turn to the unruly, dark gods as spring gets under way. In this season of prodigal abundance, Ciccio worships her because she is pregnant. March in the Italian hills brings a 'real flowering': the scent of wild narcissus is 'powerful and magical' to her (LG, p. 335), there are 'white and blue violets', 'sprays of almond blossom', 'peach and apricot', rose-red gladioli and black-purple irises (LG, p. 335). Frazer records how magenta anemones, indigo grape

¹⁰⁵ See Brett Neilson, 'D. H. Lawrence's "Dark Page": Narrative Primitivism in *Women in Love* and *The Plumed Serpent*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 43 (1997), 310-25.

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hyacinths, rose cyclamens, lavender crocuses, rose-red gladioli and black-purple irises are emblematic of rites of protection against malignant spirits or of ancient fertility deities such as Persephone. In this riot of natural colour, Alvina 'felt like going down on her knees and bending her forehead to the earth in an oriental submission, they were so royal, so lovely, so supreme' (*LG*, p. 335). She seems to blend with her vibrant setting, divested of the incubus of socially constructed, rather than essential, selfhood; even her modern time metamorphoses backwards into mythic history. The hectic fecundity of this vegetative milieu is measured against the flyblown interior of the local Roman Catholic church:

The place was large, whitewashed, and crowded with figures in glass cases and ex voto offerings. The lousy-looking, dressed-up dolls, life size and tinselly, that stood in the glass cases; the blood-streaked Jesus on the crucifix; the mouldering, mumbling filthy peasant women on their knees; all the sense of trashy, repulsive, degraded fetish-worship was too much for her. (*LG*, p. 333)

The repugnance at agrarian realities is underscored by the galling irony that social relations in Pescocalascio seem little improved from those of Woodhouse.

For Lawrence, as opposed to Forster, Italy cannot supply a classless enchanted realm in which the gentlewoman and the peasant may interact as social equals, each adopting an intersubjective conception of the other. The natives, 'dumb and elemental' are like '[f]orlorn aborigines', who treat Alvina 'as if she were a higher being' (*LG*, p. 316). On both sides is a deep misunderstanding of the other's true identity and role. Although the 'outside world' is 'so fair', with corn and maize 'growing green and silken' (*LG*, p. 333), Alvina recoils from the hyacinths, which remind her 'of the many-breasted Artemis, a picture of whom, or of whose statue, she had seen somewhere. Artemis with her clusters of breasts was horrible to her, now she had come south: nauseating beyond words.' (*LG*, p. 333) 'Nauseating' indicates the psychological complexity of the pregnant Alvina's condition. She is frightened, fretful and depressed; yet she longs to see her child.

Alvina's fluctuations of mood are a crucial element in the psychological truth of these closing chapters. The figure of Artemis, covered all over with breasts to mark her connection with childbirth, sickens Alvina because it recalls her encounter with Mrs Tuke in travail, who felt 'torn to pieces by Forces' (*LG*, p. 334). This image of Mrs Tuke in the thrall of a painful pregnancy clashes with Angel Clare's facetious evocation of Tess as 'Artemis' in the pre-dawn light of Talbothays. Lawrence works against this destructive dilettantism by showing the elemental potencies assailing Alvina as genuinely hostile and feral, rather than simply exotic names in Angel Clare's fatuous love-play. Lawrence's conception of Artemis emphasises the

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double edge of the gifts bequeathed by the dark gods in *The Lost Girl*, where spiritual exaltation mingles constantly with precipitous danger in the Italian section.¹⁰⁶ Artemis, though spotless and detached, is associated with savage and bloody ceremonials, which H.D. also signifies: 'Greece is a thing of rocks that jag into you', Hermione in *Asphodel* muses, 'every Greek line of poetry breaks you, jags into you, Hellenes the supreme masochists, *hurting* – how did they manage it?'¹⁰⁷

VIII

Alvina's self-imposed exile from 'civilised' English mores brings rapport with a rugged natural milieu that would be alien to Angel Clare's fanciful imaginings of a pastoral paradise populated by gallant swains and coy milkmaids in Hardy's *Tess*. Alvina can throw off 'the burden of intensive mental consciousness' (*LG*, p. 238) and enter into a nonhuman world. The 'dark presence' of 'otherness' that Aldous Huxley registered in Lawrence's best writing becomes in *The Lost Girl* the alterity of the Italian periphery. Keenly alert to the ancient landscape upon which a new one is being laid, Alvina uncovers a full-bodied presence imbuing the surrounding void: an immense embodiment of unconscious energy. Lawrence refines a vision of Italy as a country strange enough to 'lose oneself away from the world'.¹⁰⁸ However, the spirit of place is far from innocuous to an Alvina guilty of the dangerous arrogance that presumes it can sever all ties with the real and symbolic Old Country.

Alvina, like Richard Lovatt Somers in *Kangaroo* and the eponymous protagonist of *Aaron's Rod*, aspires to become an escapee in the mould described by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*: those

¹⁰⁶ See Gutierrez, 'The Ancient Imagination of D. H. Lawrence', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 27 (1981), 178-96; Haegert, 'D. H. Lawrence and the Aesthetics of Transgression', 2-25; Eva Yin-i Chen, 'Primitive Masculinity and the Violence against Women: Race, Gender and Sexuality in D. H. Lawrence's Fiction of the Mexican Period', *NTU Studies in Language and Literature*, 10 (2001), 129-72.

¹⁰⁷ H. D., *Asphodel*, ed. by Robert Spoo (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 167.

¹⁰⁸ D. H. Lawrence, *The Boy in the Bush*, ed. by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 245. Hereafter referred to as *BB*.

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who are best at “leaving,” those who make leaving into something as natural as being born or dying, those who set out in search of nonhuman sex – Lawrence, Miller – stake out a far-off territoriality that still forms an anthropomorphic and phallic representation.¹⁰⁹

Lawrence underlines the paradoxical nature of exposure to strange wells of secret life-force by portraying the vivid yet ominous energies swarming beneath the forbidding terrain. Alvina possesses a tense modernity fused with receptiveness to an environment heavy with the debris of its primeval forebears; she becomes a metaphysical voyager, questioning the moralities and social verities of her cultural heritage, and debunking the orthodox attitudes which hamper spontaneity and personal growth. By granting the dark centre of herself and her surroundings precedence over the bland formalities of the ‘dead-and-rotten Old Country’ (K, p. 290), Alvina yearns for spellbound immersion in a ‘land with a new atmosphere’ (K, p. 350) and a numinous presence, to participate in some larger nonhuman drama.¹¹⁰ Lawrence records in *Study of Thomas Hardy*, ‘[t]his is the constant revelation in Hardy’s novels: that there exists a great background [...] which matters more than the people who move upon it’.¹¹¹

Alvina’s withdrawal is by no means simply life-enhancing. Lawrence’s conception of agrarian Italy suggests both the reassuringly familiar South of the Romantic imagination, whose ripeness is replete with exotic promise and grace, but also signifies a site of acute self-alienation and penury. Here is a more tangled and tortured notion of expatriate awareness than that process of becoming ‘unEnglished’, articulated by the eponymous protagonist of the unfinished autobiographical novel *Mr Noon* (1922), which slyly comments upon Lawrence’s first trip to Italy with Frieda:

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 315.

¹¹⁰ See Maristella Trulli, ‘Primitive and Christian Religion in D. H. Lawrence’s Work’, *Cuadernos de Literatura Inglesa y Norteamericana*, 4 (2001), 47-66.

¹¹¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, p. 28. Several critics have explored how Hardy’s conception of a ‘timeless’ terrain rich in anthropological survivals impacts upon Lawrence’s literary landscapes: Richard D. Beards, ‘D. H. Lawrence and the *Study of Thomas Hardy*: His Victorian Predecessor’, *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 2 (1969), 210-29; Daleski, ‘Lawrence and Hardy: The Music of Figures’, in *D. H. Lawrence: The Cosmic Adventure: Essays Based on Selected Papers from the Fifth International D. H. Lawrence Conference*, ed. by Lawrence B. Gamache (Toronto: Borealis, 1996), pp. 1-16; Mark Kinkead-Weekes, ‘Lawrence on Hardy’, in *Thomas Hardy*, ed. by St. John Butler, pp. 90-103; Robert Langbaum, ‘Hardy and Lawrence’, in *D. H. Lawrence and Tradition*, ed. by Jeffrey Meyers (London: Athlone Press, 1985), pp. 69-90; Squires, ‘Scenic Construction and Rhetorical Signals in Hardy and Lawrence’, *D. H. Lawrence Review*, 8 (1975), 125-45.

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For the first time he saw England from the outside: tiny she seemed, and tight, and so partial. Such a little bit among all the vast rest. Whereas till now she had seemed all-in-all in herself. Now he knew it was not so. Her all-in-allness was a delusion of her natives. Her marvellous truths and standards and ideals were just local, not universal. They were just a piece of local pattern, in what was really a vast, complicated, far-reaching design [...] And he became unEnglished. His tight and exclusive nationality seemed to break down in his heart. He loved the world in its multiplicity, not in its horrible oneness, uniformity, homogeneity. He loved the rich and free variegation of Europe, the many-ness. His old obtuseness, which saw everything alike, in one term, fell from his eyes and from his soul, and he felt rich. There were so many, many lands and peoples besides himself and his own land. And all were magically different, and it was nice to be one among many [...] He seemed to feel a new salt running vital in his veins, a new, free vibration in all his nerves.¹¹²

Alvina's introduction to the fully embodied landscape of agrarian Italy also 'unEnglishes' her, but without permitting any cosy consolation of 'far-reaching design'. The sensory overload of forbidding topography, flora, and blinding sunlight contributes to a sense of 'annihilation' that forcibly reminds her how profoundly pathless, how *unhoused* she has become, since no construct exists, whether psychological or concrete, to soften the horrifying impact of disintegration. Noon's buoyant extended reverie, which idealises a 'magically different' counter-site is undercut with malicious glee by Lawrence in *The Lost Girl*. Europe's 'variegation' only partially camouflages the incomplete, fickle, and unanchored entities which assault the heroine once she settles in her husband's hill town. Whereas Noon registers richness of diversity and emancipation from the 'delusional' received opinions in his flight from a parochial home, Alvina suffers countless privations when caught in the unforgiving grip of an Italian peasant's material existence – a house freezing cold, open to the animals and out-of-doors.¹¹³ And the 'free vibration' welcomed by Noon clashes with the domestic subjugation to which Alvina must become accustomed. Her 'tight and exclusive nationality' dissolves during the journey to Italy, and the loss of her British passport makes her effectively invisible. She becomes increasingly alert to the ontological and cultural contingency that a view from elsewhere forces upon those who rebuff the 'horrible oneness' of England.¹¹⁴

¹¹² D. H. Lawrence, *Mr. Noon*, ed. by Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 134-35.

¹¹³ To survive her time in her husband's settlement Alvina must 'never, if she could help it, enter into any interior but her own – neither into house nor Church nor even shop or post-office [...] The moment she went through a door the sense of dark repulsiveness came over her. If she was to save her sanity she must keep to the open air, and avoid any contact with human interiors'. (*LG*, p. 333)

¹¹⁴ Alvina's migrancy, seeking in new surroundings the new in herself, also supplies a complex commentary on the compulsive need for perpetual peregrination that defines Rawdon in *Aaron's Rod*, who declares: 'I am a vagrant really: or a migrant. I must migrate. Do you think a cuckoo in

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The Lost Girl interrogates, rather than venerates, the imaginative contours of expatriate aspiration, the eroticised submission that imbues agrarian southern Italy with a spuriously seductive glamour. Alvina's regression to the primitive in this material space of racial, ethnic and cultural otherness unleashes inhuman terrors: vestigial remnants of a chaotic, non-Christian past. Lawrence ruthlessly redefines Alvina's Woodhouse 'nostalgia' – her intuitive grasp of the ineffable areas of being inimical to rationality – to exclude any hint of soothing sentimentalism. To earth, sea, and sky in this marginal zone she has the propensity to respond lyrically; but her willed, even exultant surrender to a landscape and culture straddling the antique and the contemporary, causes a Gothic shudder:

She seemed to feel in the air strange Furies, Lemures, things that had haunted her with their tomb-frenzied vindictiveness since she was a child and had pored over the illustrated Classical Dictionary. Black and cruel presences were in the under-air. They were furtive and slinking. They bewitched you with loveliness, and lurked with fangs to hurt you afterwards. There it was: the fangs sheathed in beauty – the beauty first, and then, horribly, inevitably, the fangs. (*LG*, pp. 333-34)

The insistent presence of an authentic speaking voice gives the passage its peculiar intensity. Clipped sentences and clauses, organised to show an emphatic, personal, awed intonation ('They were furtive and slinking'), conveys the hallucinatory quality of spectral visitations and connotes Alvina's uneasy awareness of a locality 'which savagely and triumphantly' refuses 'our living culture' (*LG*, pp. 370-71).¹¹⁵ To Alvina, these entrancing but vengefully destructive spirits are powerfully present in what Lawrence shows increasingly as a vortex of warring potencies and stark temporal juxtapositions that invokes Nietzsche's conception of the 'modern soul' looking backwards into an atavistic heritage and forwards into a nebulous, flickering futurity at the same moment:

[t]he past of every form and mode of life, of cultures that formerly clashed – horizontally or vertically – is flowing into our 'modern souls' [...] Our instincts now can run back in all kinds of directions; we ourselves are a kind of chaos [...] Through our half-barbarian bodies and desires we have all sorts of secret entry into places that were closed to any distinguished epoch.¹¹⁶

Africa and a cuckoo in Essex is one *and* the same bird? – Anyhow, I know I must oscillate between north and south, so oscillate I do [...] I would very much like to try life in another continent, among another race. I feel Europe is *becoming like a cage to me*. Europe may be all right in herself. But I find myself *chafing*. Another year I shall get out. I shall leave Europe. I begin to feel caged'. See D. H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod*, pp. 290-91.

¹¹⁵ See Jean Wyatt, *Risking Difference: Identification, Race, and Community in Contemporary Fiction and Feminism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 147-48.

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Alvina is granted 'secret entry' to a locus of ungrounded simultaneity, but her atavistic ethics that seek value and legitimacy in the primitive exposes an abyss of unimaginable danger. When she tries to attach names to the daimonic 'presences' around her, she is unable to neuter their hectic threat and sinister sentience. Lawrence denotes how these '[b]lack and cruel' potencies are akin to the original undifferentiated Pelasgian *theoi* mentioned by Herodotus, or like Harrison's Keres, ghosts and genii, imperious in their demand for propitiation and compelling responses at once fearful and erotic. This is a moment of terrible ecstasy not dissimilar to Mrs Moore's in the Marabar Caves of Forster's *A Passage to India*. Mrs Moore cannot handle the crisis of identity that the cave induces and she loses all sense of metaphysical unity underlying the phenomenal world. Yet Alvina is painfully cognisant of what is happening to her in this heterogeneous expatriate region of fluid, uncontained and open-ended cultural forces. This sensation is redolent of Jack Grant's experience in *The Boy in the Bush* (1924): '[y]ou felt yourself so small, so tiny, so absolutely insignificant in the still, eternal glade. And this again is the malevolence of the bush, that it reduces you to your own absolute insignificance, go where you will' (BB, p. 286).

When Alvina is languishing in the Midlands, Lawrence signifies that she possesses 'ancient sapience' (LG, p. 35) which on the Continent evolves into a feverish 'mediumistic' capacity, the exquisite torture of the 'neuralgia' in her 'very soul' (LG, p. 315). Her 'clairvoyant' mode of perception, exposing her in Throttle-Ha'penny to 'underground trolls' and myriad 'figures of fairy-lore' (LG, pp. 65-66), now uncovers the 'tomb-frenzied vindictiveness' of Furies and Lemures. Alvina is an equivalent of that Nietzschean crusader in *Beyond Good and Evil* who scorns bourgeois complacencies to traverse an alternative arena of risk and reward: 'The greatest shall be the one most capable of solitude, the most hidden, the most deviative'.¹¹⁷

Darkness, in large measure a glamorous symbol of metamorphosis and sudden sensual disordering throughout the English section of *The Lost Girl*, acquires fiendishness and menace when Alvina resides in Italy. Her impressions of her makeshift foreign home become increasingly profound and indescribable, even approaching psychic dissolution, which belies any straightforward set of assumptions about expatriate privilege and self-transformation.¹¹⁸ This mirrors Lawrence's own ambivalence in his travel-

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 137.

¹¹⁸ The gifts of the dark gods often bring mania, as Plato describes in the *Phaedrus*: Apollo, the mania of prophecy, Dionysos, maenadic frenzy, the Muses, the mania of poetry, and Aphrodite, the mania of desire. Perhaps consoled by Plato's legitimisation of irrational seizure, Lawrence figures his own episodes of psychic breakdown in terms approaching divine mania. See Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, 4 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), III, p. 173.

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writings concerning the perceived difference between the 'Northern' and 'Southern' races, the one immersed in sensual blood-consciousness, mind submerged, the other 'purely free and abstract'.¹¹⁹ *Twilight in Italy*, a collection of essays reflecting his first visit to Italy, reveals that the traditional customs and folk-practices in Italian hill-villages can appear 'an old static conception', utterly detached from 'the great flux of life' synonymous with metropolitan modernity.¹²⁰ The ancient peasant cultures of the Mediterranean, however 'organic' and replete with productive vigour they might seem to the outsider's rapt gaze, do not guarantee the delightful novelty upon which the nomadic sensibility thrives. This is Lawrence's attempt to subvert the ethical impulses that underpin Forster's early fictional forays into exotic otherness: the attempted recuperation of an organic community, or an instinctual primitive connection with the cosmos, realising a condition of absolute liberation or non-responsibility. *The Lost Girl* implies that the bewitchingly lovely yet fanged 'presences' in the Italian 'under-air' only hint at Lawrence's troubled apprehension of the ineffable pressure exerted by a foreign locale. There can be no easy mastery here of an unfamiliar geographical or cultural condition that loosens the grip of received opinions through an affirmation of their profound contingency.

Lawrence's demanding and astringent treatment of the Persephone myth during the closing chapters exposes the uneasy implications of Alvina's pilgrimage to a region that inflicts on its indigenous population far greater hardships than what she stoically endures in the English Midlands. The early chapters of *The Lost Girl* might promise a recapitulation of modernist cartography, in which the industrialised West is figured as the static and narrowly drawn domain of instrumental reason, sterile mechanism, and marketplace economics, the asinine, the neurasthenic, and sexually repressed. But Lawrence ensures that his depiction of Alvina's courageous quest to the forbidding rocky core of an Italy still mired in a medieval past erodes the wispy romance of place and problematises the notion that a site of expatriation has the potential to ameliorate the baffled modern condition.

Twilight in Italy buttresses *The Lost Girl* in demonstrating that expatriates might struggle to achieve self-realisation in an environment so at odds with their entrenched bourgeois assumptions, nurtured in 'the upper world of glowing light':

¹¹⁹ D. H. Lawrence, 'The Lemon Gardens', in *Twilight in Italy and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 116.

¹²⁰ D. H. Lawrence, 'San Guadenzio', *Twilight in Italy*, p. 159.

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[t]he Italian people are called 'Children of the Sun.' They might better be called 'Children of the Shadow.' Their souls are dark and nocturnal. If they are to be easy, they must be able to hide, to be hidden in lairs and caves of darkness. Going through these tiny, chaotic backways of the village was like venturing through the labyrinth made by furtive creatures, who watched from another element.¹²¹

Lawrence's allusion to these 'furtive creatures' recalls Alvina's apprehension of 'furtive and slinking' presences in the Italian 'under-air'. Lawrence stresses Alvina and her husband not as characters, viewed merely externally, but as dynamic concepts of life and agents of eternal forces acting both within and without human identity.¹²² What name in the 'illustrated Classical Dictionary' (*LG*, p. 334) can do justice to an experience of a plural, ambiguously constructed ethos that falls outside not just everyday terms, but outside human terms altogether? Lawrence admits that the 'label' involves a separation from the thing itself. No god, which man can conceive of, will be absolutely right for his purposes, as the 'potent negative centres' eventually 'overthrow' Alvina's 'psychic being' (*LG*, p. 314).

The Lost Girl attests Lawrence's resolve in facing what appalled Hardy, Webb, and Forster, in attempting to uncover a vitalising potency, a chaos that could be embraced joyfully and creatively in that perception of man estranged from nature. Lawrence rescues the Persephone figure from the repressive rubble of Hardy's late-Victorian culture and makes the myth pertinent again in a period of seismic social upheaval. He exploits the ancient tale to illustrate in an increasingly uncompromising way Alvina's reaction to an elemental world and her preservation of its illuminating power in the bitter darkness of her waiting.

But Lawrence does not vouchsafe a straightforwardly sanguine and life-affirming account of the Persephone myth.¹²³ The pattern of many of H.D.'s autobiographical narratives allude explicitly to Persephone's *kathodos*, or descent, often signalled by depression, mania or physical debility – at the end of *Hermione*, for instance, 'Hipparchia' in *Palimpsest*, and of *Asphodel*. In this last novel *Hermione*, during her pregnancy, muses about the coming of winter: 'sun lies heavy on the rough brambles, berries are almost over, frost

¹²¹ D. H. Lawrence, 'The Spinner and the Monks', *Twilight in Italy*, pp. 104, 110.

¹²² Katherine Mansfield, in her initial impressions of *The Lost Girl* sent to Middleton Murry in December 1920, viewed this method of characterisation as a serious weakness: '[i]t ought not to be allowed to pass [...] Lawrence denies his humanity. He denies the powers of the Imagination. He denies Life – I mean, *human* life. His hero and heroine are non-human. They are animals on the prowl. They do not feel: they scarcely speak [...] The whole is *false* – ashes [...] It's a kind of sinning against art [...] This is bad and ought not to be allowed. I feel a horror in it – a shrinking'. See Edward Nehls, *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography*, 3 vols (Madison: New York, 1957-59), II, pp. 51-52.

¹²³ See James J. Miracky, *Regenerating the Novel: Gender and Genre in Woolf, Forster, Sinclair, and Lawrence* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

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makes a veil, the bride of God, the dead bride, Persephone veil over the bushes, over me, Persephone in Hell'.¹²⁴ Lawrence pushes this feeling of physical deprivation, as Alvina 'almost stupefied with weariness and the cold, bruising air' (*LG*, p. 313), is subsumed by the pagan twilight. She resides in Califano (most of the time by herself) for at least nine months, from November until the birth of her child. She feels utterly abandoned and spiritually bereft, given the outbreak of World War I and Ciccio's conscription.¹²⁵ If, as William Connolly argues, 'the world is always richer than the systems through which we comprehend and organise it',¹²⁶ then Alvina, however much she revels in bewildering diversity, cannot survey her new Italian neighbours in Califano as a 'richer' alternative to the Woodhouse curtain-twitchers and vulgarians she left behind in the lacklustre English Midlands.

Alvina, craving opportunities for self-invention yet suspended between desire and disenchantment, ponders whether she might make a fleeting foray into the surface world of English manners: '[s]he was always making little plans in her mind – how she could get out of that cruel valley and escape to Rome, to English people' (*LG*, p. 336). Yet 'she knew how easy it would be, once her spirit broke, for her to die and be buried in the [Italian] cemetery' (*LG*, p. 336). If *The Lost Girl* seems to imply a narrative of anticipated redemption as Alvina swaps homogeneity for plucky and reckless 'experiments',¹²⁷ boring convention for bracing innovation, then the Italian section derails this generic and sentimental expectation by manifesting instead a story of frustrated alienation and a dearth of organic community ties. Indeed, the 'outbreak of World War I functions to mask the essential failure' of Alvina's 'experiment in expatriation'.¹²⁸ Trapped on the far side of human sociality, she is 'mute, powerless [...] like a lump of darkness, in that doomed Italian kitchen' as 'death and eternity were settled down on her' (*LG*, p. 338). This fate seems little better than her former status in the sepulchral

¹²⁴ H.D., *Asphodel*, p. 168.

¹²⁵ This ending invites comparison with the paradigmatic quest narrative of Aaron's *Rod*, set in a period of time just following World War I. On Christmas Eve its eponymous protagonist walks out on his wife and three small daughters and – except for one surreptitious visit to retrieve a few items – never returns. His restless and incomplete journey away from the dubious fulfilments of bourgeois domesticity takes him first to London and then to Italy where the narrative leaves him, as is so often the case with Lawrence, desperate and disoriented.

¹²⁶ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 32–33.

¹²⁷ See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 132–33.

¹²⁸ Papayanis, 'Italy's Best Gift', 313.

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Manchester House as 'shabby and penniless, a mere household drudge' (*LG*, p. 61).¹²⁹

The heroine, exploring an extremity to locate what Richard Rorty terms 'the power of language to make new and different things possible and important',¹³⁰ ends as a victim enmeshed by mystical centripetal energies that induces a condition of radical self-dissolution. Despite her voracious appetite for the polymorphous and the random rhythms of nomadic life, for heterodoxies and multiplicities inherent in an expatriate ethos, Alvina 'could not do as she liked. There was an inflexible fate within her, which shaped her ends' (*LG*, p. 38).¹³¹ Men, according to Lawrence, can only be 'free when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away'.¹³² And thus Alvina is consigned to a version of 'Hades' – a careworn exile caught between obdurate resistance and despairing resignation, between time-cruised social forms and the exacting complexities of felt sensation. She cannot go back to Woodhouse, nor can she acclimatise sufficiently to Califano. This isolated pioneer both fashions and deplores her own loneliness. As a young 'dandy' visiting her village remarks, 'this country is a country for old men [...] You won't stop here. Nobody young can stop here' (*LG*, p. 334). If Ciccio returns from the war, there is the faint prospect of a New World for this modern Persephone, whose 'questing soul',¹³³ is stymied by circumstance.

The Lost Girl's final pages denote that Alvina's spiritual odyssey is just beginning as she contemplates a future without a husband who clearly needs her at least as much as she needs him. Resolute enough to face pregnancy and childbirth in Califano without Ciccio, Alvina views this enforced separation

¹²⁹ 'In the ponderous, rather sordid nullity of Manchester House she became shadowy and absorbed [...] She was always more or less busy: and certainly there was always something to be done, whether she did it or not'. (*LG*, p. 62)

¹³⁰ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 39.

¹³¹ Alvina is like Chris Bongie's melancholy traveller for whom 'the exotic necessarily becomes for those who persist in search of it the sign of an aporia – of a constitutional absence at the heart of what had been projected as a possible alternative to modernity'. See Chris Bongie, *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 22.

¹³² D. H. Lawrence, 'The Spirit of Place', pp. 16-17.

¹³³ Lawrence's letter to Compton MacKenzie (10 May 1920) about *The Lost Girl* discloses both his uncertainty about where his life is going and his passionate identification with Alvina: 'I'm terrified of my Alvina, who marries a Ciccio [*sic*]. I believe neither of us has found a way out of the labyrinth. How we hang on to the marriage clue! Doubt if it's really a way out. – But my Alvina, in whom the questing soul is lodged, moves toward reunion with the dark half of humanity [...] I feel as if I was victualling my ship, with these damned books. But also, somewhere they are the crumpled wings of my soul. They get me free before I get myself free. I mean in my novel I get some sort of wings loose, before I get my feet out of Europe.' See *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, III, pp. 521-22.

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as ‘a test on her’, after which ‘Ciccio must take her to America’ (*LG*, p. 320). It is a measure of Lawrence’s sophisticated scepticism that *The Lost Girl* ends with a tense recognition not only of the value but also the grave risk, discipline and cost of Alvina’s Plutonic ‘passion for new insight’¹³⁴ – disavowing one’s birthplace, caste, and nation for fresh adventures at the ragged margins of the familiar and the safe.

The Lost Girl, reflecting a pivotal moment in Lawrence’s career when he finally managed to leave England after the war and was striving towards abandoning Europe altogether, ultimately signals disenchantment because southern Italy cannot palliate his Persephone figure’s dreams of inhabiting a locus of prolific and dynamic barbaric forces. Alvina’s craving for unqualified mobility ironically results in a cathartic closure being perpetually deferred. As Lawrence conceded in a letter to Robert Pratt Barlow shortly after completing *Aaron’s Rod* and *The Lost Girl*:

we make a mistake forsaking England and moving out into the periphery of life. After all, Taormina, Ceylon, Africa, America – as far as we go, they are only the negation of what we ourselves stand for and are: and we’re rather like Jonas running away from the place we belong. That is the conclusion that is forced on me [...] I really think that the most living clue of life is in us Englishmen in England, and the great mistake we make is in not uniting together in the strength of the real living clue – religious in the most vital sense – uniting together in England and so carrying the vital spark through.¹³⁵

In the next chapter, Mary Butts furnishes a robust response to Lawrence’s ‘conclusion’ by reinstating the fertility goddess to a secluded nook in southwest England corresponding to Hardy’s infinitely stratified conception of Wessex. If, according to Lawrence, ‘[m]en are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealised purpose. Not when they are escaping to some wild west,’¹³⁶ then it is Butts’s task to supply a glimpse of such a community, so that ‘the vital spark’, the ‘real living clue’ might be excavated through a painstaking process of imaginative archaeology.

Optical metaphors proliferate in Butts’s fiction, illustrating women’s role as brave custodians and wary watchers of this ‘vital spark’. Whereas *The Lost Girl* connotes how the ‘real living clue’ is at least accessible to a young woman of nondescript class origins, Butts avows that the decoders of this arcane script can only be found among a ‘natural’ elite or landed aristocracy. In her memoir *The Crystal Cabinet* Butts portrays her own cosmic initiation thus: ‘I saw more than I could tell’ (*CC*, p. 267), a ‘translation [...] between

¹³⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 132–33.

¹³⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, III, p. 587.

¹³⁶ D. H. Lawrence, ‘The Spirit of Place’, p. 17.

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the seen and the unseen' (CC, p. 266).¹³⁷ The dauntless patrician heroines of Butts's novels evince a deep suspicion of, even hostility towards, the social group into which Alvina is born. Butts's message is mobilised through an exclusionary notion of 'Englishness' rooted in a paranoid politics of provincial solidarity, genetics, and heterosexuality that casts an uneasy light on the feminist pacifist Helena Swanwick's thesis, posited in the year after Butts's death in 1938, that '[women] are, collectively, indispensable and [. . .] it is their duty to use their selective power to save the race'.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ In Butts's autobiography Poole Harbour in Dorset is linked to suburban spread – what she mockingly describes as the unwelcome incursions of 'a herd of jungle-swine' (CC, p. 243) that seeks to subvert the tranquil 'balance of an old rural constituency' (CC, p. 245). Lofty notions of property, class and genealogy inform her sense of something 'in my blood and my training that came out of the very stuff of England' (CC, p. 262).

¹³⁸ H. M. Swanwick, *The Roots of Peace* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), p. 192.

Chapter 7

Salvaging the Goddess of Wessex

I

Hundreds of peoples have had goddesses delivered of gods & the father nowhere much about; or spring-brides, ascending & descending from underground [...]

There is only one Persephone.

[A]s for our anthropologists – they will write up the facts of every belief in every quarter of the globe; but even the best of them, Frazer hardly, gives one the least idea, the least suggestion of the passion, the emotion that made men behave like that. [...]

It is for art to take over the anthropologist's material.¹

In a journal entry for 1 October 1929, Mary Butts (1890-1937) proposes that the creative artist is better equipped to exploit the obscure sources of myth, magic and ritual than the school of armchair anthropologists epitomised by Sir James Frazer.² Frazer's acolytes 'write up the facts' as a kind of imaginative imperialism, adhering to a nineteenth-century ideal of objective, calmly rational spectatorship that discounts how all knowledge and values are subjective hypotheses determined by historical and cultural standpoint. Butts, like her esteemed predecessor Thomas Hardy, was born in what Frazer designated as one of the richest expanses of archaeological real estate in

¹ *The Journals of Mary Butts*, ed. by Nathalie Blondel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 324-25. Hereafter referred to as *Journals*.

² After decades of unwarranted neglect, Mary Butts is at last enjoying some richly deserved, if posthumous, critical scrutiny. Her manuscripts are housed in the Beinecke Library at Yale. Butts's short story about Paris in the 1920s, 'The Master's Last Dancing', was published in *The New Yorker* (March 30, 1998), 109-13. Recently, Butts made the cover of the *TLS*, accompanied by Laura Marcus's article 'Mysterious Mary Butts', *Times Literary Supplement* (August 24 2001), pp. 3-4. Throughout this revival McPherson has been reissuing all of Mary Butts's books in uniform editions. For a detailed and incisive overview of the author's career and work, see 'Mary Butts, 1890-1937', ed. by Jennifer Garipey, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, 77 (1988), 69-109. For general articles on Butts's work see Chris Goodrich, 'Early Modernists Olive Moore, Mary Butts Back in Print', *Publishers Weekly* (17 February 1992); Michael Upchurch, 'Rediscovering Mary Butts', *Washington Post Book World* (20 September 1992), 11; Brenda Wineapple, 'Shadow of the Left Bank', *Belle Lettres* (1992), 32, 34; Harvey Pekar, 'Butts is Back', *Los Angeles Reader* (24 April 1992); Jascha Kessler, 'Beauty and the Beast: Rediscovering Mary Butts', *The Bookpress*, 3 (1993), 1, 12-14; David Seed, 'Extending the Modernist Canon', *Bete Noire*, 14/15 (1994), 405, 407-412; Elizabeth Shostak, 'Mary Butts: The Permanent behind the Impermanent', *The Boston Book Review* (1995), 28-29.

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Western Europe, cluttered with the survivals of Celtic and Roman occupation.³ In a quietly impassioned tribute to her friend, the artist Christopher Wood, Butts reflected,

We both came from the same part of England, the short turf & chalk hills which are like nothing else on earth. They sprawl across counties, & our history & the history of man written on them in flint & bronze & leaf & grey stone. Written on very short grass full of small black & white snail-shells. A dry country of immense earth-works & monstrous pictures done on the chalk stripped of its grass. From Avebury [Wiltshire] to Stone Cliff [Sussex] it is the same, sprawled across a kingdom, the history of England open. Also its secret history in letters too large to read.⁴

She depicts her birthplace as an immense geographical palimpsest, in which numberless generations have inscribed their aesthetic impressions and religious intuitions for a posterity that is too philistine, facile or fractured to decipher them. According to Butts, this 'country' which 'no man, not Hardy even, has found full words for' (CC, p. 63), excites 'a fresh "spiritual" adventure [...] a re-statement & a development of our old experience in the field which gave us our religions'.⁵ In an untitled poem of 1913 Butts wrote: 'We were Gods once, behold our steadfastness!'⁶ The god that imbues her most compelling fictions is Persephone, whose procreative potential and capacity for cultural renewal touches the lives of Vanna in *Ashe of Rings* (1925), Scylla in *Armed with Madness* (1928), and Felicity in *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932).⁷ Butts's female fertility figures resonate with topography full of precious and imperilled residues that appeal, in various

³ As Scylla Taverner remarks in Butts's *Armed with Madness*, 'this country was given its first human character in the late stone age'. See Mary Butts, *The Taverner Novels: 'Armed with Madness' and 'Death of Felicity Taverner'* (New York: McPherson, 1992), p. 13. Hereafter referred to as AWM. In *The Crystal Cabinet*, Butts remarks that residing in Hardy country was like living in a region 'with all its bones showing, whose fabric and whole essence is stone, which is dominated and crowned by stones; standing stones on the moors, cairn and castle [...] each field fixed by a phallos' (CC, p. 12). Barry M. Marsden's *Pioneers of Prehistory: Leaders and Landmarks in English Archaeology (1500-1900)* (Ormskirk: Hesketh, 1983) notes the high level of antiquarian attention devoted to Wessex, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See also John Michell, *Megalithomania: Artists, Antiquarians and Archaeologists at the Old Stone Monuments* (London: Thames, 1982).

⁴ Butts, *Journals*, 14 June 1931, p. 360.

⁵ Butts, *Journals*, 1 February 1930, p. 341.

⁶ This untitled poem was no. III of Mary Butts's 'In London' cycle (1913).

⁷ References to these novels can now be found in *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. by Virginia Blum, Patricia Clements, Isobel Grundy (London: Batsford, 1990); Rodney Legg, *Literary Dorset* (Wincanton, 1990); *The Oxford Guide to British Women Writers*, ed. by Joanne Shattock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); *The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature*, ed. by Claire Buck (London: Bloomsbury, 1992).

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ways, to the historical and sacrosanct identity of a nation, a jealously guarded iconography of what it means to be 'English'.

Butts's 'spiky pastoralism'⁸ is unusual in this study given that the Demeter-Persephone myth casts its shadow not just over a single literary work but also over much of her non-historical fiction. As Anthony Ashe explains to his young bride in Butts's first novel *Ashe of Rings*, "'Do you not understand the link between yourself and a great goddess – the type of all things which a woman is or may become?'" (AR, p. 14). The eponymous heroine in *Death of Felicity Taverner* accentuates this mythical link; she operates as a mediating force, in step with the transcendent and eternalised measure of an imperial national identity that only her stalwart disciples can secure against a succession of persistent threats. Felicity Taverner's 'appearance and disappearance' permits her troubled family members, a 'war-ruined generation',⁹ to 'find their way' through 'the Waste Land' (DFT, p. 283), from cultural collapse to hopeful regeneration.

Butts's female protagonists possess an ameliorative ability, coupled with a mysticism enabling them 'to live in two worlds at once [...] in time and out of it' (CC, p. 13). Since in Butts's opinion, 'Christianity [...] had taken away from women their priestesshood',¹⁰ her typical heroine becomes a true adept whose passional intensity flows from a primordial pact of blood with animistic Wessex soil, which has crowned her its heroic steward, and which helps make the veil between the visible and invisible domains periodically transparent. In her *Journals* Butts describes her own artistic and spiritual odyssey using imagery that evokes Persephone's traumatic descent into the chthonic realm and back:

I'm the same woman but re-crystallised; something has been added to me & fused – or is fusing. I wonder sometimes if I shall live it out; but I have lived death & I have lived life. Plunged, steeped once more into that which is 'eternal' – always there, in the things which our lives & eras are only ways of saying, endless repetitions on life-and-death-themes.¹¹

Butts's heroines embody Jane Harrison's theorization of the pre-eminence of ritual practice in uncovering the elemental and the ultimate, 'a thing that's been lost' (AWM, p. 79) in an interwar Britain whose 'strident indifference' (TFU, p. 299) towards 'all forms of religion' (AWM, p. 130) implies that the project to have 'the soul living at its fullest capacity, using itself',¹² is not

⁸ Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 19.

⁹ Butts, *Journals*, 12 February 1928, p. 293.

¹⁰ Butts, *Journals*, 20 March 1933, p. 422.

¹¹ Butts, *Journals*, 23 September 1929, p. 323.

¹² Butts, *Journals*, 29 March 1927, p. 248.

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only stymied, but tragically derailed. '[E]verywhere there was a sense of broken continuity, a dis-ease. The end of an age, the beginning of another. Revaluation of values' (AWM, p. 9).¹³ Butts elaborates this vision in her highly-strung memoir of childhood up to the age of 22, *The Crystal Cabinet*, showing the bankruptcy of organised religion as a repository and legitimator of meaning. She avers that modern men and women are hapless victims of deracinated urbanism, 'paralysed and hypnotized, in the name of Science' since contemporary disbelief is 'a Black Death of the spirit sweeping over post-war Europe' (CC, p. 133).¹⁴

Into this ravaged milieu the Persephone figures appear as hierophants of the maternalised primitive, a mercurial, distant though by no means disinterested force to be invoked and enlisted if 'Englishness', Butts's carefully crafted notion of ancestral memory, is to resist defilement and desecration from without.¹⁵ The narrator of Forster's *Howards End* seeks to forge relationship despite and across the obstacles of caste and formal education that segregate him from others. Butts's fictional project prizes and verifies the ineluctability of difference, conserving the safety of the hidden. In her short story 'Green', an authentically 'English' consciousness registers intuitively the '[p]ropriety, simplicity, the routine of country-house life'¹⁶ – disparaging an open-ended, dizzying multiplicity of traditions and histories in favour of a single, already resolved national narrative savoured only through exclusive rites of remembrance.¹⁷

¹³ For a trenchant appraisal of Butts's complex depiction of war trauma particularly in *Ashe of Rings*, see Ian Patterson, 'Mary Butts', in 'Cultural Critique and Canon Formation: 1910-1939' (Cambridge, Unpublished PhD, 1997). Part of this chapter, which considers *Death of Felicity Taverner*, appears as 'The Plan Behind the Plan: Russians, Jews and Mythologies of Change', in *Modernity, Culture and "the Jew"*, ed. by Laura Marcus and Brian Cheyette (London: Polity Press, 1998).

¹⁴ On the importance of *The Crystal Cabinet* in Mary Butts's oeuvre see Joy Grant, 'Glimpses and Grievances', *Times Literary Supplement* (23-29 December 1988); Meg Spilleth, 'The Effects of Childhood', *The Minnesota Daily* (28 September 1988); Blondel, 'The Crystal Cabinet', *P. N. R.*, 15 (1988), 53-55.

¹⁵ Jane Garrity contends that 'Scylla and Felicity are goddesses [...] for each woman transcends the human while simultaneously functioning as a racially pure blood-link to England's past'. See *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 189.

¹⁶ Butts, 'Green', in *From Altar to Chimney-Piece: Selected Stories*, preface by John Ashbery (New York: McPherson, 1992), p. 64.

¹⁷ Sebastian Faulks ignores these aspects of Butts's craft in favour of reinforcing the wilder, mythical aspects of her life: '[t]he English writer, Mary Butts, a devoted opium smoker with tangled red hair, wrote regional novels of the English West Country with mystic overtones'. See *The Fatal Englishman: Three Short Lives* (London: Hutchinson, 1996), pp. 29-30. This tendency also mars the references to Butts in Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1930* (London and New York: Women's Press, 1987),

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This imaginative quest underlines Frances Swiney's exhortations in her feminist tract *The Awakening of Women* (1899) that the Englishwoman's 'personal duty' is to instil 'racial pride' and keep the 'great Anglo-Saxon nation [...] pure and undefiled'.¹⁸ As Jane Harrison stresses 'the worship of the Mother emphasizes the group, the race and its continuance'.¹⁹ Butts's abiding fascination with Harrison's anthropological research into matriarchal prehistory was partly due to its argument that women are 'more racial' than men, and thus 'may be of use for the whole body politic'.²⁰ Butts's priestly heroines resemble Harrison's conception of the 'moderns', who approach the world without belligerent or coercive designs upon it. Doggedly refusing to make sense of it, they simply attune their ears and 'trust the background to tell its own tale'.²¹

II

Towards the end of her life Butts declared, 'to some extent I think I shall be remembered as an English writer',²² for whom the concept of a numinous bounded territory, replete with '[r]ough, barrow-haunted places' (AWM, p. 128) was paramount. Born at Salterns, in a house overlooking Poole Harbour in Dorset in 1890, she eventually settled in England's most westerly inhabited village Sennen Cove, Cornwall, a 'whole district thick with folklore',²³ where she lived from 1930 until her untimely death in 1937. Her remarks also signal the centrality of *how* you live in that 'little farthest corner of England'.²⁴ Butts views herself as a votary with unswerving loyalties to

though Hanscombe and Smyers are to be praised for placing Mary Butts beside her contemporaries.

¹⁸ Frances Swiney, *The Awakening of Women* (London, 1899), pp. 256, 121.

¹⁹ Harrison, *Mythology* (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1924), p.63.

²⁰ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 134.

²¹ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual* (London, 1913), p. 199.

²² Quoted in Blondel, *Scenes*, p. xvi.

²³ Ruth Manning-Sanders, *The West of England* (Batsford, 1949), pp. 40-41. On the apparent 'remoteness' of Sennen and its Lands End environs, see Daphne Du Maurier, *Vanishing Cornwall* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 53.

²⁴ Manning-Sanders, *The West of England*, p. 39. See also Jennifer Clarke, *Exploring the West Country: A Woman's Guide* (London: Virago, 1987). Mary Butts is mentioned only in the Dorset section, in spite of being buried in Cornwall, and having published a great deal about the Cornish landscape. Manning-Sanders, a writer already in residence in Sennen when Mary Butts arrived, provides a detailed account of this region in *The West of England*: '[t]o many people the all-but-island of West Penrith (the part of the Duchy that lies west of a line drawn through the narrow neck of land that separates the Hayle estuary on the north coast from Marazion on the south) is the essential Cornwall. The area has a character all its own. The sea is almost everywhere in sight, and always within hearing' (pp. 40-41).

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the spirit of place, yet she cannot divulge secret mysteries of the soil to the boorish, uprooted subjectivities of urban sprawl: 'there is a Neolithic earthwork in the south of England. It is better not to say where. The fewer people who pollute that holy and delectable ground the better'.²⁵ In her *Journals* she recounts 'the horrors done to Salisbury Plain [...] Hoardings & vile villas & petrol-stations, & that most beastly sight, the rotting bodies of cars'.²⁶ The first duty of Butts's fertility goddess is to police with unflinching vigilance 'the keltic border'²⁷ of an imagined genetic nation.

Like the volumes which Butts claimed to have aided her mother burn after her father's death in *The Crystal Cabinet*, or like the Book of Ashe with its challenging inscriptions, or Felicity Taverner's darkly erotic and esoteric 'diaries' (*DFT*, p. 259), Butts's mystical version of Wessex has to be kept in obscurity at all costs, a hermetic 'text' impervious to the communicative rationality of public debate.²⁸ However much she wishes to refashion south Dorset's scenery as a national spiritual resource, she does not trust the transgressing 'outsider' (*AWM*, p. 115; 'Green', p. 63), emboldened by escalating domestic tourism, to manage it discreetly. Her own ineffable perception of regional lore, founded upon ideas of genetic stock, feudally situated forebears, and passionately remembered legacies, is figured as utterly beyond the grasp of the vacuous creeping hordes who gain increasing visibility in Butts's preservationist pamphlets. She is aggressively opposed to the pastoral ideas of nature which have filtered into, and become automatically falsified by, the mass public consciousness of those 'whose life has been passed in towns' (*TFU*, p. 213). This is an aspect of Butts's 'intolerance' that, according to Bryher, would make 'easy fame impossible'.²⁹

'Englishness' in Butts's literary vision is typified by the readiness to freely 'enter' the 'mythological world'³⁰ through genetics and ontology, to a wellspring of patrician virtue, an elliptical and august code alien to 'foreigners' and the 'new barbarians' inured to the 'vibrating roar' and 'street shrieks' of towns (*WH*, p. 279). In *Howards End* Forster's narrator asks, '[i]s it credible that the possessions of the spirit can be bequeathed at all? A wych-elm tree, a vine, a wisp of hay with dew on it – can passion for such things be

²⁵ Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', p. 349.

²⁶ Butts, *Journals*, 7 November 1935, p. 451.

²⁷ Butts, *Journals*, 20 October 1929, p. 327.

²⁸ On Butts's writing and its relationship to women's literary strategies based on 'ellipsis, erasure, obliquity, compression, symbolism, ambiguity [and] the desire to reinvent identity', see Sandra Kemp, '"But How Describe a World Seen Without a Self?": Feminism, Fiction, and Modernism', *Critical Quarterly*, 32 (1990), 99-118.

²⁹ Bryher, 'Recognition Not Farewell', *Life and Letters Today*, 17 (1937), 160.

³⁰ Butts, *Journals*, 19 April 1921, p. 181.

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transmitted where there is no bond of blood?’ In Butts’s fiction the ‘bond of blood’ is fundamental; while the ‘trespasser’ (*AWM*, p. 131) who aims to profane Nature’s holy sanctuaries, against which her Persephone figures swiftly mobilise the Wessex soil’s defensive energies, becomes a key component in her dialectic of modernity. In *Ashe of Rings* and the *Taverner Novels*, a daughter’s claim to an ancestral habitation is ratified by demonstrating how a cultural fantasy of Englishness is anchored in patriotic reverence for the moral benefits of reproduction, alongside a profoundly insular definition of racial and cultural homogeneity.

The Crystal Cabinet forcefully illustrates how a sense of yearning for a racially specific rustic motherland underpins Butts’s imaginative re-invention of Dorset as a realm of charmed and irreplaceable particularity, populated by mythic potencies, whose numinous undercurrents can only be registered by indigenous aristocratic elite. Jane Harrison averred in 1913 that the ‘country is always conservative, the natural stronghold of a landed aristocracy, with fixed traditions; the city with its closer contacts and consequent swifter changes and, above all, with its acquired, not inherited, wealth, tends towards democracy’.³¹ Butts’s twenty-acre family estate Salterns, hallowed by the fondness of childhood memory (‘[t]he kind of house the Dorsetshire gentry lived in’) is central to her anthropological venture, embodying and invoking in her mind ‘the old, hardy, fragrant rural world’ of ‘Dorset, the county where, if anywhere, the secret of England is implicit, concealed, yet continually giving out the stored forces of its genius’ (*CC*, p. 14).³² Butts viewed Salterns as a locus where ‘the wind was different, and a goddess called Artemis [...] shot with the new moon’. And when Butts looked ‘across the threshold into a garden’, she saw ‘the Golden Bough growing from the Tree of Knowledge, not yet of good and evil, but of true knowledge’ (*CC*, pp. 22, 10-11).

If from childhood Butts reacted to the austere grandeur of her native landscape through the mannered artifice of mythical allusion, it only served to heighten the precarious purity of her birthplace. ‘At Salterns, at the dawn of my life, Power and Loveliness walked naked over East Dorset, side by side. Lay down to sleep together like gods on Purbeck, rose out of the dawn-washed sea’.³³ The rugged actuality of Salterns afforded Butts the primal

³¹ Harrison, quoted in Patrick Wright, ‘Coming Back to the Shores of Albion: The Secret England of Mary Butts (1890-1937)’, in *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 107.

³² See also Butts, ‘Mr. Powys’s Dorset’, *The Sunday Times* (18 February 1934), p. 11.

³³ In *The Crystal Cabinet* the child Butts ‘could not think of’ the Isle of Purbeck (which she could see from her house) ‘as anything else but a live thing [...] a true daimon, as the young of each race first see power. Something like the Greek stories my father gave me and sometimes told me, only not in a book’ (*CC*, p. 22).

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experience of autochthony that Forster could only connote through the woolly abstractions of *Howards End*.

In *The Crystal Cabinet* Butts fashions herself as a Persephone figure, whose idyllic upbringing in an 'only slightly sub-aristocratic home',³⁴ is cut tragically short, not through abduction by a brutal, parasitic and predatory male, but through betrayal by a bungling, uncaring Demeter, whose gross mismanagement of the estate's finances results in the eventual sale of the sacred property and the dispersal of its priceless authentic treasures; flight is the only option left for the child, separated from this enclosure and its 'magic of person and place'.³⁵ Forster, having lived in his beloved Rooksnest from before the age of four through pre-puberty, and establishing that ardent connectedness with a piece of English soil so crucial to his writings, the boy of fourteen was tormented 'by his sudden exile from this rural paradise'.³⁶ Butts's 'exile' narrative focuses on a plucky but severely neglected daughter, culturally and economically disenfranchised, yet striving to reclaim her rightful inheritance. This plot infuses her non-historical novels, many of which obsess over the dynamics of a nuclear family, especially that of dignified patrician lineage whose quasi-mystical feeling for history is expressed through ancestral memories of genesis, racial purity, a zealous commitment to auratic objects, and eternal rhythms:

[s]ome time after the Religious Wars we left Norfolk, where we had lived since King John's time, and never seriously settled anywhere else. An eighteenth-century great-uncle had been Bishop of Ely, but from our ancestors we had inherited [...] possessions and the love of them [...] A rather small, slow-breeding race, red-haired, with excellent bodies and trigger-set nerves. Persistent stock, touched with imagination, not too patient of convention, and very angry with fools [...] profoundly sure of ourselves, for reasons we ourselves know best.

For reasons of a secret common to the blood. A secret concerned with time and very little with death, with what perhaps medieval philosophers called *aevum*, the link between time and eternity. (CC, p. 15)

The retrospectively hallowed site of Salterns is non-synchronous, a still centre in a turning world, or an anthropological 'survival' preserving aesthetic and ethical imperatives long since discarded by the bovine

³⁴ Patrick Wright, 'Coming Back to the Shores of Albion', p. 104. Butts's conception of herself as Persephone invites comparison with William Carlos Williams, who speculated on the myth that was central to his experience: '[t]he legend of the Rape of Persephone, or Kora, had been familiar to me from my beginnings and its significance to the pagan world. March has always been my favourite month, the month of the first robin's songs signalling the return of the sun to these latitudes; I existed through the tough winter months of my profession as a physician only for that'. See *Imaginations* (New York, 1970), p. 29.

³⁵ Butts, 'The Magic of Person and Place', *The Bookman*, 85 (1933), 141-43.

³⁶ See Colmer, *E. M. Forster: The Personal Voice*, p. 3.

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mainstream majority. Butts evinces the mythical *daughter's* savage sense of entrapment within, and acute desire to escape from, an interwar purgatory of bourgeois philistinism, created in part by the liberal consensus of mass democracy. So the Persephone figure's journey entails conjuring up a copious but artificial springtime milieu, lavishly endowed with the forgotten fragments of prehistoric peoples. This is a measure of the rustic estate, 'before Nature happened, Rousseau, Swedenborg, Blake' (*DFT*, p. 51), whose nomenclature is only apprehended by the rare but beleaguered few. Butts's topography of the mind is laden with ancient myths but with little link to modern agriculture; it is untouched by the falsehoods and fabrications of urban pastoralism, whose misty-eyed interpretation of Wordsworth, she believes, effects a barren modern sensibility that knows only how to consume, rather than commune.

In the concluding chapter of *The Crystal Cabinet*, Butts's mystical initiation occurs not in Sicily but in Badbury Rings, the Iron Age earthworks near her Dorset birthplace: a 'temenos' full of lingering pagan vibrations, which produces an associative rumination on ritual practice, 'the right balance of mana and taboo', and their integral relation to 'Roman Britain' (*CC*, p. 266). Her rhapsodic evocation of British prehistory as a 'temenos', or site of ancient purification, is measured against the tense, neurasthenic languor she imagines as the dubious inheritance of the lifelong urbanite. The goal of 'this business of the unseen', as she calls it, is to 'sense a design' traceable to a pre-industrial English culture whose national ideal is anchored in the exiled daughter's deep feeling for her venerable vicinity:

[t]hat afternoon, I was received. Like any candidate for ancient initiations, accepted. Then in essence, but a process that time after time would be perfected in me. Rituals whose objects were knitting up and setting out, and the makings of correspondence, a translation which should be ever valid, between the seen and the unseen [...] Like any purified, I was put through certain paces; through certain objects, united to do their work, made from the roots of my nature to such refinements of sense-perceptions as I did not know that I possessed, made aware of those correspondences. (*CC*, p. 266)

Badbury Rings supplies 'that business which included in itself end and beginning and all sequences that run between' (*CC*, p. 264), what Butts terms the 'contact between the visible and invisible, the natural order and the supernatural' (*CC*, p. 265). Myth, magic, and a state of visionary madness leads her toward 'a theophany, a shining-out of a God' (*CC*, p. 186), which entails a co-joining of primitivism with what is sacred in her chronicle of a Dorset countryside full of ancient herms, dew ponds, and 'green' roads set

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off against chalk and flint.³⁷ In Butts's fiction this can operate as both a cultural critique of contemporary actuality and as a defiant celebration of the blessed few who struggle to find refuge from town-bred invaders and the formally democratic rationality of the liberal marketplace. However particularised questions of personal history might be in *The Crystal Cabinet*, Butts repeatedly signifies how her plight mirrors that of an entire dislocated generation burying its dead, reeling from a loss of 'station'; whose hallowed political traditions are engulfed by the corrosive cant of the masses. This is in stark contrast to Forster's mature political declarations in which he prioritises personal relations over urgent national claims, his muted praise of a democratic impulse that generously 'admits variety' and 'permits criticism' of ideological orthodoxies of all kinds.³⁸ Butts's literary endeavour to finesse a modern Persephone who resuscitates a 'real England' becomes the salvaging of a social clique whose most precocious members have been unfairly deprived of their time-honoured role and status.

The core informing principle of *The Crystal Cabinet*, which resonates through Butts's novels, is not simply a proto-feminist perception of a daughter exposed to the unfathomable mysteries of a numinous bounded site. Nor is it a clear-cut dramatisation of the bitter conflict between a landed patrician elect and a socially mobile, yet aesthetically stunted bourgeoisie. What Butts repeatedly returns to is the coding of *family* as a peculiarly problematic social institution whose pact with the elemental terrain of Wessex is irredeemably sullied by an impolitic or hasty marriage alliance, thus becoming a source of festering generational dismay. Family is a trait clinched only through high 'birth' and 'breeding', while marriage is a degraded social ruse that debases the currency of aristocratic connections. In both *Ashe of Rings* and the *Taverner Novels*, the structured hierarchy of family is tipped into turmoil through an exogamous alliance. Thus the figure of a malign non-indigenous 'pollutant' acquires a nightmarish, even Gothic tinge in Butts's writing, which warns of 'what will happen to the world if it decides to scrap its tradition & all conscious continuity with it'.³⁹ Her versions of Persephone are compelled to safeguard bloodlines and a sacred topography against a host of contaminating 'foreign' influences.

In *Armed with Madness* the pollutant is a black homosexual war-veteran Clarence. Against the radiant 'whiteness' of Scylla Taverner and her 'better bred' friends (*AWM*, p. 14), Clarence is fixed by a crude degenerationist discourse of racial selfhood: his body 'branded with shrapnel and bullet and

³⁷ See Charlotte H. Beck, 'Review of *Ritual, Myth and Mysticism in the Work of Mary Butts: Between Feminism and Modernism*', *American Literature*, 73 (2001), 207-08.

³⁸ Forster, 'What I Believe', p. 70

³⁹ Butts, *Journals*, 1 October 1929, p. 325.

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bayonet thrust' (AWM, p. 128) while his exacerbated mentality, prone to bouts of 'frightful emotion' (AWM, p. 63), typifies an 'always dark [...] country' (AWM, p. 25); he registers 'a menace that walked hand in hand with night, joined with the fear natural in remote places to a man not intuitively attuned' (AWM, p. 128); his entering of a room is juxtaposed with another character's memory of the lyrics to a 'negro song' – 'Bear Your Burden in the Heat of the Day' (AWM, p. 51).⁴⁰

Scylla, as 'white' fertility deity and imperious living emblem of territorial nationalism, must forestall the unwholesome homosexual coupling of Clarence and Picus because it implies only the black gay man's grievous reproductive failure, having no 'eggs to lay' (AWM, p. 87). Lacking any exalted sense of correspondence with historically embedded Englishness, Clarence is propelled into a Hades of limitless suffering, consigned to that 'place where no sane man would live' (AWM, p. 126). He is unable to follow Scylla's prescription to 'have faith' (AWM, p. 70) because faith requires the worship of a fecund female principle and a sumptuous ancestral legacy that necessarily marginalizes those who are secretly different and too feeble to defend themselves. In contrast Picus and Scylla – heroic symbols of, and living testaments to England's racial survival – uphold the 'true greenwood' and 'chalk roads' (AWM, p. 8) of their native Dorset, revelling in the 'green' under their feet (AWM, p. 162). This heterosexual couple appears in a state of harmonious, beneficent togetherness, 'playing at happy warriors' (AWM, p. 159), which hints at the curative effects of pagan ceremonial for those who are 'the same thing' (AWM, p. 58) racially and sexually.⁴¹ This resolution seems to endorse J. A. Hobson's 1902 theories of race improvement, and the urgent need for eugenic strategies: '[i]t is as essential to the progress of man as to that of any other animal, as essential in the future as in the past, that reproduction shall be from the better stock and that the worst stock shall be eliminated'.⁴²

In *Death of Felicity Taverner* the threat to family security comes from a Russian Bolshevik Jew, Nicholas Kralin. The son of a Tolstoyan proletarian-idealist who fled pre-Revolutionary Russia, he becomes a version of Pluto/Dis, symbolising both the invisible fluctuations of capital and the insidious mechanistic science which facilitates its frantic industrial increase. Butts exploits the central association of Pluto/Dis with 'wealth' in Kralin,

⁴⁰ J. B. Priestley acknowledged, in his review of Butts's first collection of stories, *Speed the Plough*, the effectiveness with which she conjures up the psychosis of broken men returned from the war. See 'Review of *Speed the Plough*', *London Mercury*, 8 (1923), 99.

⁴¹ Because the novel is a series of shifting erotic triangulations (Picus-Clarence-Scylla; Scylla-Lydia-Philip; Carston-Picus-Scylla; Felix-Boris-Ross), it is difficult to enshrine any dyad as definitively stable.

⁴² J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: Nisbet, 1902), p. 173

who becomes a force so deleterious in the novel's scheme that he even menaces the stability of European 'civilisation' (*DFT*, p. 316) itself.⁴³ Kralin is determined to impose his own private vision of the nether realm onto the verdant, unspoiled surface of the Taverner estate by commercialising it: the construction of bungalows, car parks, shops selling knick-knacks of touristic kitsch, cinemas, and petrol pumps to clutter and choke the 'Sacred Wood' (*DFT*, p. 359) with 'greasy papers' (*DFT*, p. 343), thus preventing the earth from cleansing itself again. This construction of the Jewish 'speculator' is responsive only to what G. K. Chesterton termed 'the brute powers of modernity'.⁴⁴ That Kralin personifies a 'usurious' diminution of the culturally elegant to grossly economic factors, is adumbrated by *Ashe of Rings*: Serge Sarantchoff, the Russian exile, becomes involved in a bid to reclaim stolen property (papyrus fragments, Egyptian beads, and other trinkets of priceless mystical, as opposed to mere cash value) which is eventually traced to the house of a shadowy 'Jew dealer' (*AR*, p. 59).

In *Death of Felicity Taverner*, another Russian exile, Boris Polteratsky, is key to rescuing more extensive 'property', the 'green transparent world' of south Dorset, from Kralin's proposed redevelopment.⁴⁵ Kralin's surname, in addition to evoking 'Stalin', also signals the working-class mass democracy 'crawling' across the borders of Western Europe in the chaotic aftermath of the Russian Revolution. He is not merely coded as the emissary of demonised Jewish entrepreneurship, that 'untraditional part of humanity' (*DFT*, p. 314), or a sinister covert conspiracy: he is a shapeless entity, defined by protean flux, 'limitlessly self-interested',⁴⁶ seeping inexorably into a post-war vacuum once occupied by stately religious rituals consecrated by tradition.

Though 'Kralin is a Jew' (*DFT*, p. 284) because of what Butts implies are irreversible and immutable hereditary traits, his sexual identity is radically indeterminate: a 'voluptuous man who could not yield himself to pleasure' (*DFT*, p. 241), a 'eunuch of the kingdom of nothing's sake' (*DFT*, p. 178). Although allegedly impervious to erotic promptings, Kralin is sex-obsessed: he brings into Felicity Taverner's home his grotesquely comic 'harem' of 'heavy haunched and over breasted' city women 'wearing a terrible parody of country clothes' (*DFT*, p. 201), that conveys not only his desecration of her private chambers but also Butts's virulent class prejudice against a proletariat invading the estate from squalid urban tenements on rapid transit.

⁴³ See Ian Patterson's discussion of the growth of post-war British anti-Semitism and its promotion of 'the myth of the Jewish-Bolshevik menace' in "The plan behind the plan", p. 130.

⁴⁴ G. K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 23.

⁴⁵ Kralin's ambitions to buy up surrounding land and commercialise Dorset's geography would have clearly benefited from the speculative licence that existed prior to Clement Atlee's 'Town and Country Planning Act' (1947).

⁴⁶ Ian Patterson, "The plan behind the plan", p. 136.

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Kralin's macabre blurring of ethnic and sexual categories – Slav or Jew, robustly masculine or mincingly effeminate – makes him antithetical to Butts's cherished anthropological ideal of 'mana', organically stable and structurally integral to every living organism: 'the non-moral, beautiful, subtle energy in man and in everything else, on which the virtue of everything depends' (*TFU*, p. 328). By describing 'mana' as 'non-moral' Butts partially veils a vexed component of this apparently free-floating, untrammelled entity in her fiction: its disturbing association with Anglo-Saxon supremacy, racial specificity, and vehement regional 'belonging'. In *Ashe of Rings* 'mana' is consistently identified with Vanna's 'holy' body (*AR*, p. 138), though Butts's rapt rhetoric hints that this 'profoundly primitive' spiritual essence is bracingly multicultural, heedless of historical and linguistic barriers, 'made serviceable to man in every religion he has ever conceived' (*TFU*, p. 326). When *Death of Felicity Taverner* asks 'What was Kralin?' (*DFT*, p. 259) it is evident that this Jewish 'master in his vileness' (*DFT*, p. 281) is the mana-less offspring of 'a new agony let loose in the world' (*DFT*, p. 245), with which her priestly heroines must grapple to 'keep' an 'exquisite part of the earth in the hands of people who will never let it be spoiled' (*DFT*, p. 258).

In a *Journal* entry for 19 November 1917, Butts claimed to 'understand anti-Semitism':

I have seen him again, not a lover, but a race, a people. They come from Asia, creeping across the world into Europe, long tentative fingers. They banked up against our castle walls like the waters before a dam. Now they run free and the blood of our noblest is mixed with theirs. Before them our forms of civilisation may not perish, but may be terribly assimilated. They are right. Where they breed, we decay.

It is rather pitiful to me – they do not love soil or care how things should grow – sentiment is outraged, & the rising sap in my body.

But I understand anti-Semitism.

We are above our races – we crystallise and I say that man's will can prevail over chaos [...] But where the East & the West have met we have Egypt & Babylon & Greece.⁴⁷

It is unclear whether the man participating in this debate about the intricacies of racial politics is Butts's lover and soon-to-be spouse John Rodker (Jewish) or the actor Edwin Greenwood. Nor is it obvious whether the unsettling metaphors 'long fingers' and 'creeping' are her choice or a sarcastic mimicry of the shrill, hysterical tabloid slogans stoking up popular prejudice. Is her sentiment 'outraged' by stridently xenophobic rhetoric itself or by the unfeeling Jewish intruders who cannot 'love' her English 'soil' and dishonour the 'blood' of 'our' noblest stock? Although the final paragraph

⁴⁷ Butts, *Journals*, p. 93.

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asserts 'we are above our races' and Butts freely acknowledges that the finest civilisations derive from a thorough cross-fertilisation of 'East' and 'West', this does not resolve the issue of her paranoid and reductive scape-goating of the Jewish Kralin in *Death of Felicity Taverner*.⁴⁸

III

Against the demonising of Kralin as a gruesome vampiric presence, with his 'unspeakable face [...] cheeks drawn in, and his teeth sticking out below his lip' (*DFT*, p. 316), Butts's eroticised formulation of the Persephone figure emerges as a magisterial symbol of unsullied 'Englishness', in which the 'natural' fuses with the 'national' to become a desperately needed store of cultural refreshment, even wholesale transformation.⁴⁹ Butts signifies that Vanna Ashe, Scylla, and Felicity Taverner, through their metonymic relation to, and continuity with, the Dorset locale, not only have *natural* rights of inheritance to the English countryside, but that the spiritual well-being of the nation is clinched through their decisive female cultural intervention. These heroines act as proud inheritors and cultivators of indigenous values, cherishing also the '[n]ecessity for a new experience of reality after the failure of religion'.⁵⁰ *Death of Felicity Taverner* engages most dynamically with the issue of patrilineal inheritance by alluding to the rule of primogeniture, which was not rescinded in England until 1925.⁵¹

This theme is adumbrated in *Ashe of Rings*, where Vanna finds herself disinherited from her homeland of Rings (based on Butts's own Badbury

⁴⁸ In 1936 Butts noted her horror and fury when, during a discussion about fascism and communism, her friend, the Scottish writer Angus Davidson, 'riled me [by] calling me "anti-Semite," when I hate cruelty as much as he, & only want – not to repeat pious platitudes about how wicked it all is, patting myself on the back for being English – but want to understand *how* & *why* it all happens; why people like ourselves can concur at least in things, actions, which make him & me sick'. See *Journals*, 14 November 1936, pp. 461-62. Davidson's reproach must have made Butts particularly angry given her letter to him two years earlier, after Hitler had become Chancellor of Germany, explaining that she and Gabriel Atkin had agreed to befriend a Jewish refugee, who was living in Sennen, from the Nazis. See Butts to Angus Davidson, 4 February 1934, Butts Papers. In *The Crystal Cabinet*, completed shortly before her death, she stated her position when remarking, 'how easily, as in Nazi Germany, the liberties we now take for granted may be lost' (*CC*, p. 180).

⁴⁹ On Butts's absorption of race science, primitive mysticism, psychoanalysis, and topographical guides to advance trans-historical mythical structures that privilege female agency, see Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, pp. 188-210.

⁵⁰ Butts, *Journals*, 19 January 1927, p. 242.

⁵¹ See Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 26, 61-78.

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Rings, a set of prehistoric concentric earthworks near Salterns, surrounding an ancient pine-wood).⁵² At the opening Anthony Ashe, the ageing patriarch of Rings, seeks a young wife to produce an heir. But his vulgarian ‘outsider’ bride Melitta, has scant respect for the mysterious and pagan aspects of the grounds: ‘because of the woman he [Anthony Ashe] has married, Rings cannot happen properly which is the life of our race. And our race has become impure. And I, who am true Ashe, am hungry and lonely and thwarted’ (AR, p. 109). By indicating that Vanna’s ‘natural’ inheritance rights outstrip and override crooked man-made ordinances, Butts’s imaginative reconstruction of south-western England supplies a mystical assertion of nationhood both intricately animistic and insistently feminised: a blood-based designation of cultural identity in new national terms that boasts divine descent. As a character in Butts’s *Cleopatra* remarks, ‘What is rotten in the body of the Republic should be cut out, that the whole may be saved’.⁵³

Butts’s typical Persephone figure resembles her reconstruction of Cleopatra as a ‘priestess [...] a woman of the ruling caste in a lost civilisation: an athlete: trained in certain lost rites’.⁵⁴ She personifies a privileged sensibility of ‘sophrosyne’: “‘Daddy said that there were things in the world, good and bad, and a thing called sophrosyne that helped you through both of them. On the road to Delphi, you know?’” (AR, p. 46).⁵⁵ This is Butts’s rigorous code of ethical chastity, stoical self-discipline, and

⁵² After one of her visits to this site in her early twenties, Butts wrote a poem celebrating the power evoked ‘On Badbury Rings’:

Broad are the girdles of the Holy Wood
Bear ramparts of lean grass close menacing,
That all but trembles on our sight, who made
Some passion of dim Gods therein out played
Or the vast act of a forgotten King
The imminent wonder, nameless luminous
On Badbury Rings.

‘Badbury Rings’, quoted in Blondel, *Scenes*, p. 114. Butts’s visit to the Rings with her friends on 12 March 1922 provoked a magical ‘sequence’. In describing it, she explained the significance of the site: ‘I lay stretched out on the ground, and understood that the Rings’ signature is written in its quiet. Its quiet is made audible by the sound in the grove. I saw the fir-tree tops on their red shafts and the bunches of needles that pass sideways. They have the sensual, distinct beauty of Japanese or Chinese silk-paintings.’ Quoted in Blondel, *Scenes*, pp. 114-15.

⁵³ Butts, *Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra*, reprinted in *The Classical Novels* (New York: McPherson, 1994) p. 191.

⁵⁴ Butts, *Journals*, 4 December 1927, p. 272.

⁵⁵ Gilbert Murray defines ‘sophrosyne’ as ‘something like Temperance, Gentleness, Mercy; sometimes Innocence, never mere Caution: a tempering of dominant emotions by gentler thought’. Quoted in Butts, *Journals*, 26 October 1917, p. 89.

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‘temperance’ (AR, p. 93), her ‘yardstick for all conduct’,⁵⁶ flowing from unbroken contact with the Dorset soil’s ‘ancient mysteries’ (AWM, p. 138), an ineffable grace and high-minded delicacy that cannot be viewed, she believes, through the fey and mawkish prism of suburban country-worship.⁵⁷

That Butts’s conception of the ancient goddess is fuelled ‘by a conviction that the modern world required a renewal of the connection between the ethical and metaphysical realms’,⁵⁸ is by itself unremarkable. An upsurge of interest in occultism, the arcane, the primitive, and the unconscious that occurred in the years before and during the First World War supplies a background to the refinement of the ‘mythic method’ in modernism, and it has been exhaustively appraised.⁵⁹ What makes Butts’s project idiosyncratic is her literary refashioning of her south Dorset birthplace as an anthropological ‘stage’, set with ‘all the properties of tragic mystery’ (AR, p. 185), upon which fully to test a numinous notion of femininity. Butts’s imaginative recasting of her ‘homeland’ is infused with that ‘contempt for democracy’ that distinguishes the harsh nationalist rhetoric against which Winifred Holtby rails in *Women and a Changing Civilisation* (1934): ‘[t]he nation is defended as a traditional, instinctive unit, something to which men feel themselves bound by blood and history [...] Its appeal is to the emotion rather than the intellect’.⁶⁰

If the representation of a female fertility figure imbues ‘the adventure of the sacred which is [Butts’s] greatest concern’,⁶¹ then this adventure cannot be divorced from a xenophobic ideology which, however obfuscated and

⁵⁶ Butts, *Journals*, 26 October 1917, p. 89.

⁵⁷ Butts is alert to how her own imaginative enterprise must be separated from, and elevated above, the ‘return to a rural England’ that infuses literature at this time (John Buchan, the Powys Brothers, Dornford Yates, Hilaire Belloc, Edward Thomas, Henry Williamson, T. H. White, A. E. Houseman, and the Sussex Kipling), as well as the established popular culture of the interwar years more generally. The ‘country’ was being brought to a newly abstract focus in the art of Nash and Sutherland; the imagery of mass advertising publicity (Shell’s country campaigns, London Transport); in music (Elgar, Delius, Grainger, Vaughan Williams) with its manipulation of bucolic association and, in some instances, of actual folk melodies. This is an epoch when an aristocratic idealisation of ‘tramping’ clashes against hunger marches, mass unemployment, and homelessness. See Stephen Graham, *The Gentle Art of Tramping* (London, 1927). The ‘England’ of Baldwin’s Conservative government was firmly supported by Arthur Bryant, the ‘anti-materialist’ Tory who campaigned for the preservation of rustic England and who described ‘the spirit of the past’ as that ‘sweet and lovely breath of Conservatism’. See Arthur Bryant, *The Spirit of Conservatism* (London, 1929), p. 75.

⁵⁸ Ian Patterson, ‘Anarcho-Imperialism, Modernism, Mystification and Muddle’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 31 (2001), 187.

⁵⁹ See Thomas J. Cousineau, *Ritual Unbound: Reading Sacrifice in Modernist Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004).

⁶⁰ Holtby, *Women and a Changing Civilisation* (London, 1934), pp. 159, 163.

⁶¹ Robin Blaser, “‘Here Lies The Woodpecker Who Was Zeus’”, in *The Sacred Quest: The Life and Writings of Mary Butts*, ed. by Christopher Wagstaff (New York: McPherson, 1995), p. 165.

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elliptical, anxiously broods over ethics, Englishness, and nationhood. Butts expressed fierce opposition to an Enlightenment heritage that deemed nature a diligently manicured rational garden, a locus of progressive development. She depicts instead an imagined universe of violently conflicting animistic potencies that lays bare unacknowledged contradictions in her notion of an English identity founded upon aristocratic continuities sanctioned by myth. Roslyn Reso Foy's recent study of Butts understates, even effaces, this complex and unsettling political bias in order to disseminate a winsomely idyllic and adulatory vision of an author in thrall to 'the beauty and wonder of nature'.⁶²

It is true that the 'wild serene land' (*DFT*, p. 248) of the Dorset Downs, dotted with dolmen and tumuli, so memorably evoked by Hardy and by Butts in her poems 'Corfe' and 'Poole Harbour', becomes her modern Persephone's playground. Survivals such as sarsen stones are her fictional memorials to an imagined terrain that both awaits completion yet is also precariously perched on the edge of extinction, besieged by a rotten and rapacious interwar society bent on erasing the taboos that lend weight and solemnity to *mana*.⁶³ By the 1930s, when *Death of Felicity Taverner* is published, Butts's narrative persona is neither able to acquiesce in the socio-political convulsions she witnesses around her, nor sanction unreservedly any of the available counter-movements. She becomes a panicked expatriate from an imaginary Wessex, stranded in a 'hideously fabricated world, under conditions that man has never known before' (*WH*, p. 277), dominated by 'people of the towns' with unparalleled motorised access to the countryside, 'of whom so large a proportion form our new kind of barbarian' (*WH*, p. 291). In 1937, the year of her death, Butts was describing her own exiled daughter status with an undiminished loathing for those held responsible for despoiling a once mystical province. Like the Stanley Baldwin of *On England* (1926) or H. V. Morton of *In Search of England* (1927), Butts recounts the idealised specificity of an intimate locale, and the charisma of its threatened associations, from a distant remove.

Place I shall never see again, that I can never bear to see. Now they have violated it,
now that its body has been put to the uses men from cities do to such places as these.
Now Salterns is no more than a white house pulled down and built onto, its back

⁶² Roslyn Reso Foy, *Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism in the Work of Mary Butts: Between Feminism and Modernism* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), p. xi.

⁶³ In her pamphlet *Traps for Unbelievers*, Butts defines 'mana' as 'the word which science has taken from the Polynesians; that which gives a man or a woman potency in every act or situation' (*TFU*, p. 323). Jane Harrison terms it thus: '[t]he mana of the Melanesians is very like *orenda* but seems to be more specialised [...] A man's social position depends mainly on the amount of *mana* he has, either naturally or by virtue of ceremonies of initiation'. See *Themis*, p. 66.

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broken, split up. [...] The cars that allow these people to run about the earth, and wherever they go to impoverish it. Driving out and abusing or exploiting something that is not their own; that unconsciously they resent – and might do well to fear [...]

I shall never see it again. Except from a long way off. From Purbeck, from the top of Nine Barrow Down, it is still possible to stand, and see, on a clear day, the maggot-knot of dwellings that was once my home. (CC, p. 20)

In her novels Butts cannot conceive of this besmirched modern terrain, or of the august Persephone figure measured against it, without resorting to narrow and exploitative stereotypes. She deploys the familiar iconography of anti-Semitism, combined with anti-alienism and anti-Bolshevism to manifest the devious and inauthentic Kralin as agent of a technological objective with no natural relationship to the region.⁶⁴ He resembles inorganic substance, unaware of ‘the touch-difference between silk and stone, or glass and jade’ (DFT, p. 296). His Jewishness is conflated with his chicanery and nihilistic drives, comprising a noxious ‘grey web’ (DFT, p. 226) that evinces ‘pockets of poisoned air’ which are ‘everywhere now’ (DFT, p. 225), akin to the ‘gruesome things’ Marianne Moore diagnosed in urban society.⁶⁵

IV

In 1901 Yeats had reflected on ‘that belief in magic which has set me all but unwilling among those lean and fierce minds who are at war with their time’.⁶⁶ Butts waged her own war with her time, employing the Persephone myth to enrich a primitivism anchored in the aspiration to reconstruct what she saw as her rightful cultural lineage. Her homeland can no longer be rescued from the mechanistic norms of the materialist ‘Tide’ except within her novels. Butts strives to reclaim a ‘natural’ aristocracy also informing Yeats’s poetic, in which the imaginative and bucolic domains are closely correspondent, rather than simply analogical or parallel. Yeats’s figure of instrumental consumption as the type of all those haplessly enmeshed in the cycles of commodity capitalism articulates a cluster of concerns elaborated

⁶⁴ In the wake of the pogroms that began in the Tsarist Empire in 1881, over two million Jews from Lithuania, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Bessarabia, and Poland fled into exile. The hundred thousand or so who arrived in England formed the largest population to relocate to the United Kingdom before the Second World War. Butts’s depiction of Kralin mirrors the development of post-war anti-Semitism from the Russian Revolution of 1917. See Sharman Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Russian Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution* (London: Cass, 1994).

⁶⁵ Marianne Moore, ‘A House-Party’, *The Dial*, 85 (1928), 258-60. Reprinted in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. by Patricia C. Willis (London: Faber, 1987), p. 147.

⁶⁶ W. B. Yeats, ‘Magic’, in *Ideas of Good and Evil* (Stratford-upon-Avon: A. H. Bullen, 1914), p. 47.

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by Butts in her *Taverner Novels*. She extends this concept of a neo-feudal artistic ethos and, while more indulgent towards the contemporary milieu, uses the same anti-financial metaphysic as a trope to celebrate 'the Grail Country',⁶⁷ an apotheosized Wessex over which her priestly female protagonists preside.

Butts inflects the Persephone myth to privilege heterosexuality through its association with Vanna, Scylla and Felicity Taverner as followers of the 'procreative earth goddess'.⁶⁸ Vanna personifies what Butts will identify in *Armed with Madness* as 'the female principle of life', stretching back into the enchanted magical history. Through Scylla, Butts hypostatizes the link between patrician power sanctioned by myth and sacred terrain, so that 'the wood and the woman' are 'interchangeable' (*AWM*, p. 12). As a 'priestess' (*AR*, p. 129), this modern female draws her serene assurance from a primal past and recognises the terror and beauty so inextricably mingled in the windswept Dorset locality. A committed anti-rationalist implacably opposed to the hegemony of 'the machine' (*AWM*, p. 90), Scylla is the conduit through which the individual's pact with a pre-industrial Dorset is consolidated: '[n]aked, the enormous space, the rough earth dressed her' (*AWM*, p. 5). Anticipating her cousin Felicity Taverner, Scylla is intertwined with, even an emanation of, her surroundings, 'translating' the natural world 'into herself: into sea: into sky. Sky back again into wood, flesh and sea' (*AWM*, pp. 67-68).⁶⁹

Felicity Taverner is not so much a woman as a figure for the endangered countryside itself: 'the hills were her body laid-down, and "Felicity" was said, over and over again, in each bud and leaf' (*DFT*, p. 191). Jane Harrison's characterisation of the omnipotent earth mother as 'Lady of the Wild Things' (*PGR*, p. 271) condenses Felicity's role as virtual agricultural deity: '[e]yelash of flowers and a shoot of ivy closing [her] eyes' (*DFT*, p. 214). Her body becomes the archetype against which the natural flora is assessed: thus, 'petals' are said to be as 'soft as Felicity's skin' (*DFT*, p. 302), rather than the inverse. Repeatedly metaphorised as a vibrant Dorset coastscape, Felicity is 'The White Goddess',⁷⁰ aligned with nostalgic longing

⁶⁷ Butts, *Journals*, 11 October 1933, p. 430.

⁶⁸ Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, p. 214.

⁶⁹ Butts's depiction of Scylla's reconstitution into the natural world recalls Marianna Torgovnick's thesis that the modernist identification with the landscape uncovers 'linkages between the female, the oceanic, and the primitive'. See Torgovnick, *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy* (New York: Knopf, 1997), p. 40.

⁷⁰ The metaphorising of Felicity as the environment implies Butts's portrayal of her beloved Salters as a violated female body (*CC*, p. 15). Robert Graves's discussion of the 'White Goddess' calls to mind Felicity, particularly in his contention that this figure is identified with whiteness and to ancient British and Greek religions. See *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1948), pp. 10, 44-54.

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for the native English principles once defended by a Taverner clan now gone to seed: '[t]he death of Felicity Taverner [...] behind it lay [...] the attack on their bodies, nerves, roots, the essence of their make-up, in the attack on their land' (*DFT*, p. 342).

Butts's insistent feminising of a 'chalk-white' south Dorset is rooted in an essentialised theory of the female form as an inexhaustible wellspring of natural ripeness and racial replenishment. It is no accident that *The Crystal Cabinet* links what we might call energy fields ('other forces') with the 'white, white and mighty' (*CC*, p. 25) cliffs of Dorset, while elsewhere she reveres the 'absolute whiteness' of Thornsedale, speculating on its primeval origin: 'England once began there'.⁷¹ Moreover, the 'business' of the Grail 'cup' in *Armed with Madness* is connected to the refrain 'Lighten our Darkness' (*AWM*, pp. 138, 147), while the concept of enlightenment signals a steady process of discoloration: 'lighten us' (*AWM*, p. 139). In *Ashe of Rings*, Vanna 'remembered that, outside, the moon would be blazing on the open chalk, on the distinct and tender outline of the hills. An old, white light, much older than the sun' (*AR*, p. 15).

Like Cleopatra, another of Butts's biologically determined heroines, Vanna Ashe, Scylla, and Felicity become 'impregnated with a life that is not the *common run* of the blood' (my emphasis).⁷² Partly through her abiding fascination with occultism, Butts increasingly fashions narratives deploying an elitist and anti-Semitic politics that runs counter to her declared intention, which is to commend both modernity's effervescent cosmopolitan brio and Jane Harrison's conception of the power intrinsic to 'woman, the primeval Lawgiver'.⁷³ Butts wishes to 're-enter greek religion & carry on where Jane Harrison left off'.⁷⁴ Butts's art, so assured in taking over 'the anthropologist's material', does so to finesse an oppositional polemic reliant upon exclusionary categories of 'Englishness'. It is this component that Foy's monograph, one of the first full-length explications of Butts's oeuvre, persistently ignores.

That Butts's re-visioning of the Persephone myth is oppositional in its very construction may not be altogether surprising given her close affiliation with Ford Madox Ford, John Rodker, Ezra Pound, and their modernist circles during the period from 1915 to 1920.⁷⁵ Moreover, her first published novel,

⁷¹ Blondel, *Scenes*, p. 261.

⁷² Butts, *Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra*, p. 220.

⁷³ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 132.

⁷⁴ Butts, *Journals*, 19 March 1930, p. 346.

⁷⁵ Butts published her first work in the *Egoist* and the *Little Review* towards the end of the war, contributing stories, poems, essays, and reviews in the 1920s to Ford's *transatlantic review*, the *Dial*, the *Calendar of Modern Letters*, *Pagany*, *Seed*, *Larus*, *Hound & Horn*, *Soma*, the *London Mercury*, *Life and Letters Today*, the *New Statesman*, and other magazines, and in the 1930s

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Ashe of Rings, was drafted between 1916 and 1919, when she was aiding the anti-conscription organisation the National Council for Civil Liberties in their London office off Fleet Street. Though she did not unequivocally back the Labour Party and was never a democrat, Butts supplied information and support for conscientious objectors, attended tribunals, and corresponded with incarcerated COs.⁷⁶ Her first success came with 'Speed the Plough', a story about shell-shock, while an earlier unpublished story, 'Making of a C.O.', was rejected on 11 October 1916; four days later she noted in her journal that she was contemplating writing 'a study in growing madness of a tortured world. The war in another aspect'.⁷⁷ This became her first novel, *Ashe of Rings*, which she called in an 'Afterword' to the London edition, 'a fairy story, a War-fairy-tale, occasioned by the way life was presented to the imaginative children of my generation'.⁷⁸

Butts's 1936 essay 'Bloomsbury' poses rhetorical questions which reverberate through *Ashe of Rings* and all her subsequent fiction: '[i]t has become a cliché to say that our civilisation is on trial. Who knows enough, who writes well enough to give life to that commonplace? Who has sufficient belief? And in what?'⁷⁹ Butts invests 'belief' in the natural aristocracy of Vanna, Scylla, and Felicity, all channels between a dateless past and an

reviewing regularly for the *Bookman*, the *Observer*, *Time and Tide*, and *John O' London's Weekly*. She helped John Rodker (to whom she was briefly married) publish early books by Eliot, Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, and Wyndham Lewis. Rodker, a poet, novelist, and entrepreneur as well as publisher, contributed to the *New Age*, the *Egoist*, and the *Little Review*, and was the first person to translate Sartre into English. He wrote on Joyce and arranged the publication of the second edition of *Ulysses*. See Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 505-21; and, for a more complete account, Jane Lidderdale and Mary Nicolson, *Dear Miss Weaver* (London: Faber, 1970); Thomas F. Staley, *Modernist Man: The Life and Times of John Rodker* (London: Cohen, 1998).

⁷⁶ A number of organisations were formed to protect individual rights early on in the war, such as the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF), set up in November 1914 for young men of military age. Alongside the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) and the National Council Against Conscription (NCAC), the NCF argued against the introduction of conscription. When conscription was introduced in February 1916, the role of the NCAC was to support and aid those not wishing to fight. In July 1916 it was renamed the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL). Here Butts came into contact with people like James and Lytton Strachey, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, G. D. H. Cole, Raymond and Margaret Postgate, Gilbert Cannan, and Bernard Langdon-Davies. For an account of Butts's work in Hackney, see Stella Benson, *Drawn from Life* (London: Collins, 1941; repr. London: Virago, 1984), pp. 39-41. See also Adrian Stephen, 'The Tribunals', in *We Did Not Fight: 1914-18 Experiences of War Resisters*, ed. by Julian Bell (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935), pp. 377-92.

⁷⁷ Butts, *Journals*, 15 October 1916, p. 62.

⁷⁸ The novel was taken up enthusiastically by the American writer and editor, Robert McAlmon, who issued *Ashe of Rings* in 1925 alongside works by James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, H. D., Ernest Hemingway, and Ezra Pound – authors Butts knew personally.

⁷⁹ Butts, 'Bloomsbury', *Modernism/Modernity*, 5 (2) (1998), 343. For analysis of 'Bloomsbury', see Blondel, *Scenes*, pp. 398-403.

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indefinite future, equipped to 'catch new relations between old ideas'.⁸⁰ Butts's custodians of patrician 'caste' (*DFT*, p. 299) evolve into 'generative saviours of a dying nation'⁸¹, instruments of purgation for the embattled rustic communities they represent through unimpeachable claims of 'pure' blood. The Dorset domain is imbued by vestiges of racial origin: crops are 'sweet' and 'blood-bright' (*AWM*, p. 41), lawns are 'dripping [...] with [flowers] the colour of blood' (*AWM*, p. 3). Butts deploys pastoral modes that exploit genre fiction for their narrative form, re-imagining the modern moment in such a way as to reinstate the affective powers of 'the old gods' to the 'impersonal forces' that Max Weber, at the same time, was subjecting to the light of sustained rational scrutiny.

Butts's non-historical fiction is saturated with female protagonists who incorporate traits and powers traditionally linked with Demeter and Persephone. The topography itself is seen in *The Crystal Cabinet* as 'the superb Liturgy which is *the matchless inheritance* of the *English* child' (*CC*, p. 55, my emphasis). Butts became an obstinate campaigner for ecological preservation and for the safeguarding of historical landmarks. She takes literally Eliot's metaphor of the Waste Land, offering a complex fictional counterpart to the conservative ecology promoted by Rolf Gardiner and the Springhead Ring, and not dissimilar to Viscount Lymington's literal auto-regeneration of the Waste Land by his 'compost and lavatory school' of agriculture.⁸² Butts's construction of the 'superb liturgy' signifies that an appreciation of 'Nature', at once reflective and immediate, intuitive and profound, is the means by which the English nation acquires a quickened perception of its geographical provenance.

Unlike Eliot, who views primitive peoples as 'capable of a state of mind into which we cannot put ourselves' (and unlike Freud, who in *Totem and Taboo* contends that art is the sole survival of the savage's 'omnipotence of thoughts'), Butts posits the ongoing possibility of a mystical mentality. This awareness 'just below the threshold of consciousness',⁸³ affronts routinised and habituated appearances, exploding the pseudo-concrete to compel the jaded everyday milieu into a sudden disclosure of deeper meanings, offsetting what she describes in her essay 'Bloomsbury' as (though not so hyperbolic given an imminent Second World War) an 'Armageddon' of 'our civilisation'.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Butts, *Journals*, 1 February 1930, p. 343.

⁸¹ Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, p. 189.

⁸² See *Springing from the Ground: An Anthology of the Writings of Rolf Gardiner*, ed. by Andrew Best (Springhead: Trustees of the Estate of the late H. Rolf Gardiner, 1972).

⁸³ Butts, *Journals*, 18 June 1931, p. 362.

⁸⁴ Butts, 'Bloomsbury', p. 43.

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However, Butts's treasured 'earth' is not lush *landscape* open to, and warmly welcoming of all; rather she evinces the cyclical pattern of *land-holding*, subject to strict laws of ownership and protection by a patrician elite whose members 'have never left' the Dorset countryside (*TFU*, p. 278), and represent an ostensibly timeless hierarchy whose Persephone figure must show ceaseless wariness in repelling incursions of a democratically legitimated, upwardly mobile urban populace. Among the 'sufferings' of her 'age' Butts highlights the tragedy of the 'aristocrat who knows only the aristoi are worth having, & yet seeing the people it was his business to help coming to destroy him'.⁸⁵ Her dream of the patrician female fertility figure is shadowed by the Gothic conception of a 'democratic enemy' (*WH*, p. 270) unable to commune with 'the tricky, intricate, sure and unsure, slow and dangerous and delightful mechanism of the earth, which cannot be hurried or learned quickly' (*TFU*, p. 280). In the final 1929 issue of the *Little Review* Butts proposed that through the spread of mass democracy, 'the worst is coming to the worst with our civilisation'.⁸⁶ A naturalised eugenic standpoint underpins this writing: only the *English* child of landed aristocracy is vouchsafed exposure to sites of invisible potency in a circumscribed pocket of English provincial mores that Hardy saw undergoing a severe social and economic transformation so deplored by Butts. As Patrick Wright affirms, Hardy's novels 'strain to describe a landscape [...] abstracted by an increasingly mechanised and capitalised agriculture', while in Butts's fiction 'there is no longer any closely experienced country life to recount'.⁸⁷

V

In *Armed with Madness*, the naïve American visitor Dudley Carston is awed by his surroundings:

'God! What a beautiful place', he said. When 'beautiful' is said, exactly and honestly, there is contact, or there should be. Then, 'This is the England we think of. Hardy's country, isn't it?' (*AWM*, p. 11)

Carston's aestheticised perception of 'Hardy's country' (*AWM*, p. 11) connotes a prettified site of touristic kitsch, a whimsical literary landscape

⁸⁵ Butts, *Journals*, 18 January 1933, p. 412.

⁸⁶ Butts, 'Confessions & Interview', *Little Review*, 7 (1929), 21-22. In its final issue, *The Little Review* printed the results of a Questionnaire sent to a number of its contributors (including H.D., Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams). Butts's reaction is reprinted in *A Sacred Quest*, ed. by Wagstaff, pp. 126-28.

⁸⁷ Patrick Wright, 'Coming Back to the Shores of Albion', p. 107.

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marketed through the Wessex Novels and aimed at 'the nature cult' (*WH*, p. 283) of a suburbanised bourgeois audience. Against this shallow pastoralism of mere retinal sensation, Butts relates a raw alternative version of 'Hardy's country', 'England off the regulation road' (*AWM*, p. 12) when pastoral sprites symbolised credible, baleful, yet enabling primeval potencies. This 'other' Dorset is so richly infused with the idea of racial origin that it is 'blood-bright' (*AWM*, p. 41). Hugh Ross Williamson's 1931 'Portrait of Mary Butts' testifies to the urgency of her conception of the 'old gods':

She was the heir of Hellas. It was on a hill that Endymion slept; Aphrodite had risen from the sea and in the woods Adonis died: Persephone haunted the meadows and Pan the pursuer still lingered by the reeds in the marshes. She had inherited their land. Gradually she came to understand them. If they began as real people, they ended as equally real forces, which refused to be moralised over but demanded acceptance.⁸⁸

This region, according to Williamson, is perfectly suited to the evocation of Persephone's arduous spiritual odyssey, from abduction and exile to the plenitude of healing reunion with the 'ecstasy' of 'place' (*AR*, p. 49) that Vanna Ashe relishes through childhood in *Ashe of Rings*. In *Traps for Unbelievers*, Butts portrays her irreligious age as a 'pathless jungle' (*TFU*, p. 5), so the Persephone myth and its assertion of an august female creatrix, harnessing the power of growth, synthesis, and resurrection imbuing all organic and spiritual entities, is a weapon against a history that, from a feminist perspective seems to chart only the dynamics of male subjectivity. Butts's Persephone, like the mysteries and myths to which she is linked, manifests both good and evil, redemptive radiance and menacing darkness – the seemingly contradictory potencies which the fictions recount in the mystical site of Hardy's country, 'charged and soaked with a desperate invisible struggle':⁸⁹

life as it flew or swam or ran on four feet, or walked with a shell for house. Life that came out of the ground, or flew in from the rim of the sky; life that mounted a few inches further each year, taller and taller into a man or a tree: life that spun for an hour in the air, a column of bright transparencies (*DFT*, p. 302)

Butts deploys the Persephone myth to underline how women are cultural disseminators of those facets of authentic Englishness (ancestral ties, mystical experience, primitive animism, and the fecundating energy of

⁸⁸ Hugh Ross Williamson, 'Portrait of Mary Butts' (1931), reprinted in *A Sacred Quest*, ed. by Wagstaff, p. 67.

⁸⁹ Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance*, p. 350.

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purgative ritual) that have been blunted by technological encroachments and dogmatic materialism.⁹⁰ In *The Crystal Cabinet*, Butts's childhood self avows

when Nature ceases to be the Mother, the all-nourisher, you are left without her, or with those aspects of her which are hostile to men who have not made their submission. It is only by obedience and conquest, or by blinding ourselves, that we cease to see how strange she is, the potential terror lying dormant, that the shifting of a stone will evoke. (CC, p. 15)

Her position here is simultaneously one of inspired votary and luckless victim, thus lending credence to Patrick Wright's premise that Butts's oeuvre is a document of 'defeat', in which 'the flight from all forms of social rationality' can be 'neither successful nor innocent'.⁹¹

However Butts's bullish response in *Warning to Hikers* unwittingly reproduces and compounds the glib clichés of urban sentimentalism that are such a frequent target for her ire:

[t]here must be one profound difference between the men of the country and the town, that the most ragged village child who ever went egg-smashing in spring, sleeping in the dirtiest cottage, has not had his sight and smell and touch and hearing corrupted from without. For unless he was born already with a life in his imagination, there is next to nothing in a town for a growing animal to do, if it is to grow according to human animal capacity. A training in "movies" [...] is no substitute for the various experiences in growth and pleasure and hardihood and danger the hillside gives, the shore, the tree and the stream and the weather, handled by a country child and by which he is handled. (WH, p. 272)

The 'ragged village child' in this extract connotes that the vital sources of animistic energy are heedless of caste, and actually favour a romanticised conception of the unvarnished country-dweller. In a 1933 review entitled 'Our Native Land' Butts explains that the 'English countryside is worthy [of] two things', the 'utmost love of which a man is capable and the final perfection of art'. This is because of

the enigmatic veil with which Nature has furnished the smallest weed in the hedge, a snail-shell, a pebble; as much as the most stupendous mountain ranges, the stateliest sunset.

No use to peer & try to snatch at the veil. Yet the whole life of poet or painter, no less than scientist or common man, has been determined by its lifting – if only for an instant – from a quite ordinary tree, a bend in a stream, a shoulder of hill, a plant, a stone⁹²

⁹⁰ See Tracy E. Bilsing, 'Review of *Ritual, Myth and Mysticism in the Work of Mary Butts: Between Feminism and Modernism*', *South Central Review*, 21 (2004), 142–44.

⁹¹ Patrick Wright, 'Coming Back to the Shores of Albion', p 106.

⁹² Butts, 'Our Native Land', *The Bookman*, 84 (1933), 252.

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It becomes evident from *Ashe of Rings* that those capable of lifting Nature's 'enigmatic veil' are depicted through a more rigidly class-bound and uncompromising notion of *mana*. This tactic marginalises the 'common man', thus offering a blueprint for the Persephone figures in the *Taverner Novels* and *The Crystal Cabinet* in which Dorset's Poole Harbour is linked to what Butts derisively labels as the fetid migrations of 'a herd of jungle-swine' (CC, p. 243) seeking to destabilise the tranquil 'balance of an old rural constituency' (CC, p. 245). *Ashe of Rings* foretells this conviction by denoting how cultural roots are bolstered by genetically based ancestral memories: 'blood is the life. Mix it and you mix souls' (AR, p. 151).⁹³

In *Ashe of Rings* Butts implements the traditional formula of the heroine Vanna Elizabeth who, with 'qualities and values pure' (AR, p. 100), is like Persephone identified explicitly with the flora of her birthplace: '[s]he beat her face with the peony-ball, a generous bunch of petals, a mother among flowers' (AR, p. 159). Once the estate becomes unbearable, or the bad mother – originally the source of generous nurturing – disregards or spurns the child, flight furnishes the opportunity to seek one's fortune and return to become 'head of the house' and 'guardian of the Rings' (AR, p. 27), heir to a 'precinct like Eleusis' (AR, p. 104).

Butts seeks to overhaul a mode of proprietorship which is merely formal, legalistic or legislative with a mystical, intuitive ownership, one that furnishes a racial link between the initiated daughter's 'Saxon sturdiness of blood' (CC, p. 199) and England's stratified geographical heritage. Because modern culture has 'lost the habit of stating problems in moral terms' (DFT, p. 297), Butts intervenes with a narrative that broods obsessively over the moral problems raised by a bequest. In *Ashe of Rings* Butts elaborates an allegorical clash between those who commune with their prehistoric landscape – an occult secret society who view themselves as the 'Eumolpidae' (AR, p. 20), rightful inheritors of the Eleusinian Mysteries – and those opportunistic interlopers who interfere with or betray a site whose inmost ring may be of '*neolithic origins, used by the Romans; a refuge for Celt and then for Saxon, a place of legend*' (AR, p. 6). Butts deepens this confrontation motif in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, depicting southwest England as a plot of 'flawless, clean and blessed, mana and tabu earth; strictly of their flesh' (DFT, pp. 258-59), urgently requiring the summary expulsion of foreign toxins like Nicholas Kralin, who 'would sell' for a pittance 'the body' of this 'land to the Jews' (DFT, p. 346).

Butts's Persephone figure in *Ashe of Rings* fuses the disparate elements of nature and, as authentic heir to ancestral mysteries, she strives to live in 'two worlds at once' (AR, p. 232): the environment can exist simultaneously in the

⁹³ Blondel, 'Preface' to *Ashe of Rings and Other Writings*, p. x.

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modern moment and, not in the past, but in an equally present daemonic dimension of *mana*. When Anthony Ashe blesses the baby Vanna he intones: “[t]he elements composed you, the elements surround you; so may their harmonious properties sustain you” (AR, p. 23). Butts’s conception of a questing mythical femininity both absorbs and interrogates the research of the Cambridge Ritualists,⁹⁴ especially that of Jane Harrison, whose ideas on primitive ritual and animism, nature cults and matriarchal origins left an indelible imprint on her writing (CC, pp. 41-42).⁹⁵ Butts declares in the fourth chapter of *Warning to Hikers* that

Contact with nature is very much what a man has when he participates in any rite or sacrament. Rites and sacraments are a kind of drama, a ritual play taken from universal natural events. They are about the health and ill-health of the soul, about marriage and birth and death. Things which happen. I think it was J. E. Harrison who said that the point of their efficacy, writing of the ancient world, at least, was that a man took out of them in proportion to what he put in. (WH, p. 290)

By 1913 Butts was already familiar with Harrison’s *Prolegomena* and *Themis*.⁹⁶ Butts read them when they were first published and returned to them repeatedly throughout her life, and always with more probing comprehension.⁹⁷ Harrison’s findings signified

the profoundest study of my adolescence – mystery cults from Thrace to Eleusis. I remembered *The Bacchae*. There are my formulae, there my words of power [...] I am rereading the *Prolegomena* [...] There I know I shall find the way. Demeter Anesidora & Dionysos of the Flower [...] here is the Hellenic grace. A vast tranquillity & assurance have come out of this.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Her fascination with the classical world explored by these pioneering Hellenists dates back to her childhood. Butts’s father, according to *The Crystal Cabinet*, had been a compelling storyteller and with ‘the tang of his irony [...] the cycles of antique story-telling [...] pleased me as they please all children, the first pleasing that never wears out, only deepens and re-quickens, like resource to a well-spring, a hidden source of loveliness and power’. (CC, pp. 17-19).

⁹⁵ In addition to numerous references to Frazer’s study throughout her writing, Butts composed a short story called ‘The Golden Bough’. First published in her collection *Speed the Plough* (1923), it has been reprinted twice since: in *Antaeus*, 13/14 (1974), 88-97, and in *That Kind of Women: Stories from the Left Bank and Beyond*, ed. by Bronte Adams and Trudi Tate (London: Virago, 1991), pp. 16-28.

⁹⁶ See Kessler, ‘Mary Butts: lost...and found’, *Kenyon Review*, 17 (1995), 211

⁹⁷ For Butts, Harrison’s *Prolegomena* and *Themis* were ‘immortal words’. Quoted in Blondel, *Scenes*, p. 44. Needing solace after the arrest of her then-lover, the poet John Rodker, for evasion of conscription as a Conscientious Objector, Butts records: ‘[b]egan Eros poem. I want the *Prolegomena* again, and *Themis*. One’s lovers die and there remain certain immortal words [...] I want all things Greek again’ (6 April 1917). See *Journals*, p. 80.

⁹⁸ Butts, *Journals*, 21 April 1920, p. 149. Butts’s knowledge of Greek places her work outside the educational experience of her female contemporaries, and was closer to that of Eliot and Pound. Virginia Woolf tried to articulate the experience of most educated women in her 1925 essay, ‘On Not Knowing Greek’: ‘[f]or it is vain and foolish to talk of knowing Greek, since in

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By 1919 Butts noted, '[t]o remember Greek life is not to adventure into a delicious ideal but to go home to something so familiar that it can bore me'.⁹⁹ Butts focused on the key phase of Harrison's *Themis* which proposes that 'the Great Mother is prior to the masculine divinities', disavowing the rationalist-hierarchical thinking exalted by her colleague Sir James Frazer as a perspective that subjugates spiritual mysticism and demeans pre-intellectual religious apprehensions.¹⁰⁰

In contrast with Frazer, who, like Freud, endeavoured to account for the evolution of man's intellect from a primitive to a civilised mentality, Butts aligns herself with Harrison's repudiation of civilisation and ecstatic embrace of the 'primitive state of mind'.¹⁰¹ This thesis breaks with Freud's evolutionist premise that the primitive exemplifies 'a necessary stage of development through which every race has passed'.¹⁰² The figuring of the sacred through ritual is a central tenet of Harrison's theory: maintaining that only rituals have religious significance, she seeks to comprehend the psychology and gestures of 'the savage' because 'we realise that our behaviour is based on instincts kindred to his'.¹⁰³

Vanna in *Ashe of Rings* is the first of Butts's Persephone figures to register and venerate this sacred link. Vanna's priestly connection with the Rings signals her creator's perception of Dorset's Badbury Rings as a numinous site:

our ignorance we should be at the bottom of any class of schoolboys, since we do not know how the words sounded, or where precisely we ought to laugh, or how the actors acted'. See 'On Not Knowing Greek', in *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth, 1969), p. 214.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Blondel, *Scenes*, p. 22. In a book review Butts related why she felt a 'profound familiarity' with classical mythology: '[o]ne reason why we study the classics, why we assume, or used to until lately, that whatever an educated man did or did not know, he must know something about the language and thought of the antique world, is because we feel that we are dealing there with men who had the same assumptions as our own. That this in itself is a very large assumption, does not trouble the intuitive conviction. We feel that their delights and desires and difficulties were in the same terms as ours: they were examining, shaping, using and being used by life in a way we understand: and when all allowances have been made for varieties of custom and speculative belief, what they did and were is recognisable; has a profound familiarity – and not of the kind that breeds contempt for us'. Quoted in Blondel, 'Preface', *Ashe of Rings and Other Writings*, p. xi.

¹⁰⁰ Harrison's earlier text *Mythology* (1890), had claimed that a single Great Mother Goddess prefigured the many divinities who constituted the Greek pantheon. In Harrison's vision of prehistory she cites anthropological evidence to connect the Great Mother to Dionysus who, in Harrison's reading, is a liminal figure – in terms of gender – and is associated with mysticism, irrationality, women, and a return to nature. See Renate Schlesier, 'Prolegomena to Jane Harrison's Interpretation of Ancient Greek Religion', in *The Cambridge Ritualists Reconsidered*, ed. by William M. Calder (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1991), pp. 213–17.

¹⁰¹ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p.166.

¹⁰² Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. by James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1950), p.29.

¹⁰³ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 29.

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[n]ow this place is enchanted – technically – concretely – if there is such a thing – by reputation, by experience, by tradition. I have felt them – but I have never seen anything but trees and grass and wind and their accompaniments. I have no sign I can tell. Obliquely I retold what I had seen in *Ashe*, but the communication and translation are oblique.¹⁰⁴

Butts's fictional improvisations around the Persephone myth in *Ashe of Rings* incorporate Harrison's notion that femininity contains a residue of the mystical and pre-rational, so as to reunite a besieged clan with the elemental energies infusing the stark contours of her Dorset birthplace.¹⁰⁵

In *Ashe of Rings*, Harrison and the Cambridge Ritualists served Butts by disclosing the significance of ancient rites in solving what was a lifelong obsession in her fiction: 'the problem of sanctity' in modernity, her belief that something 'deeper than the purely rational mind' exists, viable to those who reject the encroaching amorphism of socialist democracy in post-war Europe, pursuing instead the replenishing irrationality of a loftier 'supernatural order'.¹⁰⁶ Throughout her literary career Butts promulgates the notion that, as for Harrison and Murray, while myth is susceptible to grievous alteration over time, the ritual itself, the process of acting out, remains largely intact. The centrality of ritual practice in *Ashe of Rings* facilitates the mapping of the female body onto the Dorset landscape, reaffirming local articulations of the mystical, and more ambiguously, the authentically 'English' Persephone who safeguards a bucolic enclave from the destructive meddling of 'foreign' intruders.¹⁰⁷ Vanna's priestly capacity is a means of 'communicating with the chill fingers of the trees' (AR, p. 137): a subliminal 'language' that outsiders can never voice, let alone decipher.¹⁰⁸ Thus from the very outset of the novel, the estate's 'Eleusinian precinct' (AR, p. 65), which Vanna endeavours to reclaim, is described through an evocation of the complex historical strata which underpin the modern moment; the ancient

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Blondel, *Scenes*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁵ See Patrick Wright, 'Coming Back to the Shores of Albion', pp. 93-134. Unfortunately, Mary Butts was omitted from Gillian Tindall's *Countries of the Mind: The Meaning of Place to Writers* (London: Hogarth, 1991).

¹⁰⁶ Butts, 'Bloomsbury', 321-45.

¹⁰⁷ See Butts, 'Vision of Asia', *The Bookman* (1932), 223-25. Elsewhere, she reveals her belief that mysticism is nationally inflected: '[i]t is inevitable [...] that each nation has its own Christ. The failure (for us) lies here, that the Russian Christ is not the English. (Who [...] will give us again an English Christ?)'. See 'A Russian Prophet', *Time and Tide* (October 14, 1933).

¹⁰⁸ See Gillian Rose, 'As if the mirrors had bled: masculine dwelling, masculinist theory, and feminist masquerade', in *Body Space: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. by Nancy Duncan (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 56-74; *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, ed. by Gillian Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

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mystical associations informing the property evoke a triumphantly national narrative:

*It is said of this place that in the time of Arthur, the legendary king of Britain, Morgan le Fay, an enchantress of that period, had dealings of an inconceivable nature there. Also that it was used by druid priests, and even before their era, as a place for holy and magical rites and ceremonies (AR, p. 6)*¹⁰⁹

Ashe of Rings exploits comparative mythology and primitive ritual to bolster a concept of English 'racial memory, the animal memory' that mediates between the seen and unseen worlds. In this way Butts is strikingly similar to Harrison, who invokes ancient Greece to address the intricacies of ritual practice but ascribes her heightened perception of invisible forces to her Yorkshire upbringing. Sounding much like Butts, Harrison localises visionary trance by avowing her Yorkshire familiarity with the 'unseen [...] always haunting me, surging up behind the visible'.¹¹⁰ Here is a crucial point of intersection between the two women: their mutual refutation of the view that ceremonial practice is merely a form of imitation. Harrison sets the clarifying quality of commemorative ritual against *mimesis*, viewing it as an outpouring of emotion that results in 'a *presentation*', not in mimicry: ritual is not enacted 'for the sake of copying' an event, but for 'the *emotion felt about [it]*'.¹¹¹

Butts is also hostile towards all manifestations of the imitative and the copy; she laments the trend toward 'abstractions': whereas 'our ancestors used to personify, or [...] represent' moral qualities, today they are simply

¹⁰⁹ Butts's fastidious delineation of 'Hardy's country' associated with Arthurian romance recalls the West Country landscape around Tintagel that was at the very centre of nineteenth-century thought about the past. Tintagel Castle may be partly comprehended as a monument to invention, particularly the powers of the Norman-Welsh cleric, Geoffrey of Monmouth, who began the long process of creating an Arthurian Tintagel in his twelfth-century 'history'. In 1824, long before Tennyson's famous Arthurian Idylls were fashioned, the poet Parson Robert Stephen Hawker (1803-75) called the Holy Grail a 'Sangraal' in an imitation of medieval language and conceived Arthur in a specifically Cornish context, renaming Tintagel 'Dundagel'. He had some success in putting his mark on the legend in this respect. Tennyson temporarily included Hawker's version of the name in his *Idylls* and Hardy quoted it in his Cornish novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. See Simon Trezise, *The West Country as a Literary Invention: Putting Fiction In Its Place* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 63.

¹¹⁰ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 206.

¹¹¹ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, pp. 25, 44. In *Alpha and Omega* Harrison links the idea of re-enactment to authenticity, defining the primitive state of mind thus: '[i]f a child is "playing at lions", he does not *imitate* a lion [...] he *becomes* one' (p. 166). Harrison's focus on authenticity resonates with Butts's own obsessions, particularly her withering contempt for imitation, in a passage about childhood that is reminiscent of Harrison's scrutiny of primitive re-enactment in children: '[g]rown-up people say that children like to pretend that the things they love are alive. This is nonsense – they *are* alive [...] Alive, not with a copy of their own life, but with the life, the *mana*, proper to the thing itself' (CC, p. 81).

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reproduced in 'plastic' (*TFU*, p. 12). Like Harrison, who privileges concrete actuality over rarefied abstraction, Butts's notion of ritual re-enactment relates the authenticity of collective response rather than the individual's private emotion.¹¹² She reappraises Harrison's work to demonstrate finally the continuity and universalising impulses of the 'primitive form' (*TFU*, p. 44) of worship. Butts's language in *Traps for Unbelievers* – "Holy, Holy, Holy", sang our fathers, and felt better. What they were doing was very ancient magic' (*TFU*, p. 32) – directly alludes to Harrison's earlier pronouncement: 'We still say "Holy, Holy, Holy", and in some mystic way feel the holier'.¹¹³

While Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, a novel Butts greatly admired, employs the imagined female body as a trope for the fecund Wessex downs, Butts robustly refuses to equate the 'purity' of her natal home with female asexuality. She fashions priestly heroines who critique the regulation and fetishizing of female chastity by groups such as the National Vigilance Association, which appealed for sexual abstinence as a woman's patriotic duty. Through Vanna Ashe, as well as Scylla and Felicity in the *Taverner Novels*, Butts unites sexual excess with a high-minded spirituality, refining Harrison's theory that primitive ritual proudly discharges longing as a genuine re-enactment of emotion, rather than a trite and tawdry imitation.

In *Armed with Madness* Scylla, as a sexually experienced woman fluent in 'erotic conversation' (*AWM*, p. 32), has only a 'hypothetical virginity' (*AWM*, p. 132). In this way, she is at once palpably human and wispily ethereal, both 'witch' and 'bitch' (*AWM*, p. 10), a 'neurotic hussy' (*AWM*, p. 77) whom Butts transfigures into living legend, testimony to the sensuous immediacy of a parallel universe that welcomes the deserving acolyte. Having survived the ravages of war and 'know[ing] everything about being lost' (*AWM*, p. 31) Scylla incarnates both cosmopolitan insouciance and chthonic monstrosity. Her cousin Felicity Taverner also has a malevolent underside: this '[o]ther Felicity' is compared to 'the crescent moon' showing you 'its teeth' (*DFT*, p. 171).

Vanna in *Ashe of Rings* is 'like a bird priestess, tight in folded wings' (*AR*, p. 129); Scylla is 'a bird [. . .] woman' (*AWM*, p. 87), a 'different egg' (*AWM*, p. 19) who 'broods situations and they hatch' (*AWM*, p. 20). In *Death of Felicity Taverner*, Butts implies how feminine sexuality evokes a libidinal and linguistic superabundance that easily derails any faltering effort to fix it within the conventional structures of everyday discourse. Felicity's

¹¹² In *Ancient Art and Ritual*, Harrison posits that it is not the personal emotions of primitive man that 'become ritual, but those that are public, felt and expressed [...] by the whole tribe or community' (p. 49). Butts singles out Harrison and commends ritual practice in 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', *Ashe of Rings* and *Other Writings*, p. 363.

¹¹³ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 160.

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prodigious sexual vitality is a sign of her patriotic investment in the moral rewards of reproduction: she mates with many but paradoxically retains her stainless corporeal purity. Her embrace of sexuality recalls Harrison's characterisation of Dionysus as a feminised 'god of orgy and ecstasy'.¹¹⁴ Compared to Scylla, Felicity Taverner is arguably chief godhead; Scylla as bee-keeper (*DFT*, p. 301), with Felicity inhabiting the cell 'of a queen bee' (*DFT*, p. 220). Like the queen bee regulating the hive as a locus of reproductive bustle Felicity is both structurally central and with a destined and natural function. These bee allusions conjure up both Butts's totemic image, elsewhere, of the 'Earth-Mother [...] of the Hundred Breasts' whose nipples sprout a 'Holy Bee shining in the tip of each breast',¹¹⁵ and Harrison's delineation of fertility worshippers dancing wildly 'for hives to bring increase'.¹¹⁶ This construction of Felicity is also reminiscent of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1898), which reappraises the historically negative trope of female animality as empowering, and links the matriarchal principle with the natural: 'but for the constant inheritance from the more human male, we should have been *queen bees*, indeed, long before this' (My emphasis).¹¹⁷ Simultaneously woman and hive, Felicity supplies sustenance for the 'race-solidarity' (*DFT*, p. 272) of her fragile enclave: 'always [...] robbing some heavenly orchard and sharing the spoil' (*DFT*, p. 169). And yet an element of mystery is conserved: 'when you'd admitted her every beauty, grace and gift, you knew that something had been left out, like some secretion we haven't yet isolated or named' (*DFT*, p. 168). To the modern intrepid knights in *Armed with Madness* falls the task of pursuing that 'something' elusive and unnameable through the threatening territory of the post-war 'Waste Land' (*DFT*, p. 283).

VI

In a journal entry for September 1927 Mary Butts half-jokingly complained

Carry on from the last, *Armed with Madness*. Which might well have been called 'the Waste Land.' Eliot always anticipates my titles! Re-reading Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. A fruitful book, cf. Eliot, & as Jane Harrison & Frazer are to me. (Eliot & I are working on a parallel.)¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Harrison, *Religion of Ancient Greece*, (London: Constable, 1921), p. 54.

¹¹⁵ Butts, *Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra*, p. 326.

¹¹⁶ Harrison, *Epilegomena*, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (1898; New York: Prometheus, 1994), p. 72.

¹¹⁸ Butts, *Journals*, pp. 263-64.

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On Christmas Day 1927 she ruefully remarked:

T. S. Eliot, with his ear on some stops of English speech which have not been used before, the only writer of my quality, dislikes me & my work, I think. But what is interesting is that he is working on the Sanc-Grail, on its negative side, the Waste Land. Up to now, he has been before me with my titles. The Sacred Wood; The Waste Land.¹¹⁹

Although Butts had ‘always felt that between [Eliot and herself] there is a link of some kind, far more significant than our distant & rather irritable personal relations’ she finds him out of step with her own more vital perceptions: ‘T.S.E is now one of the Guardians of the Sanc Grail. Mayn’t he be archaising the job? Spiritual realities are not “precious”’. While she exploits a pointed comparison between her own literary project and Eliot’s, acknowledging that his ‘work’ has had a ‘profound effect’ on her ‘generation’,¹²⁰ she is not interested in merely recapitulating Eliot’s sense of hopeless entrapment in a devastated post-war milieu.¹²¹ Butts signifies in her journal entries that her commitment to notions of symbolic magic, co-opting terms like *mana* and *tabu* into English culture, means that she takes psychological and ideological issues more seriously than Eliot’s stringent rationalism and cautious orthodoxy would permit.

Whereas for Butts, Eliot’s *The Waste Land* becomes overly saturated with images of reproductive sterility, *Armed with Madness* dramatises, through the movements of Scylla Taverner’s coterie of friends, the procreative and regenerative aspects of the spiritual Grail quest, connecting it to Harrison’s theory of ritual practice, natural cycles and the potential of woman as priestess embodying the primal virtues and resilience of Persephone. Scylla fulfils the role of the ‘female principle of life’, a coping strategy and resuscitating influence, who leads those culturally dispossessed and uprooted by the effects of global conflict towards ‘a new value, a different way of apprehending everything’ (AWM, p. 9); thus counteracting what Butts deemed as Eliot’s ‘peculiarly undervitalised genius’, attested by his reliance on stunted images of femininity, both unhappy victims and unwitting agents of a desiccated locale.¹²² Eliot, in Butts’s opinion, utilises chthonic myth as a

¹¹⁹ Butts, *Journals*, p. 275.

¹²⁰ Butts, *Journals*, 25 February 1935, p. 444.

¹²¹ See Jennifer Kroll, ‘Mary Butts’s “Unrest Cure” for The Waste Land’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 45 (1999), 159-73.

¹²² Butts, *Journals*, 25 February 1935, p. 444. Eliot and Butts knew each other, although they were never close friends. In 1920, Ovid Press, run by Butts’s then-husband, John Rodker, had published Eliot’s second book of poetry, *Ara Vos Prec*. In the 1927 journal entry in which she relates the ‘parallel’ between *Armed with Madness* and *The Waste Land*, Butts indicates her sense of her relationship with Eliot. She also describes the incident that ‘made [her] after years “see through” T. S. Eliot (not to lose an ounce of [...] admiration for his poetry)’. She recalls a

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resting place or retreat; she, by contrast, dynamically redefines the ritual act to convey the redemptive power of empathetic connection with and supervision over an atavistic Dorset countryside.

In *Armed with Madness*, Scylla's clique apprehend the same existential emptiness that Eliot recounts, but they remove themselves physically from cosmopolitan culture so as to inaugurate a 'sacred game' elevated to the realm of living sacrament.¹²³ This narrative trajectory emerges from *Ashe of Rings*, in which Vanna is identified with 'the sanc-grail' (AR, p. 129). The impulse to blend emotion with rational, intellectual activity in Harrison parallels Scylla Taverner's participation in this modern Grail odyssey as a re-doing of primitive drama to canvass how art can help or hinder spiritual exercise. By having her characters 'act out' an ancient rite, Butts joins them to a more primitive mode of perception that relies on instinct and emotion than on the rationalist rigour she believes weakens Eliot's philosophical perspective. As Butts remarks in her essay on the uses of the supernatural in English fiction:

[t]here is no better book than the late Miss Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, or Miss Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, the work to which T. S. Eliot owes so much. There is set out the *natural* history of so many of our beliefs, in [...] ghost, daimon, demon, angel or god. Some were absorbed direct into Christianity; all have affected our culture; not one of which has not been, in its time, material for the finer orders of men to see more deeply into the structure of reality, and to make others see also.¹²⁴

Armed with Madness privileges the aristocratic 'finer orders' who 'see more deeply into the structure of reality', looking beyond Eliot's parched account to stress regenerative hopes through revived contact with rugged terrain that

time when '[Eliot] said: "that – in some such a way – the mandarins who went to M. Bergson's lectures at the Sorbonne may have been said to have been using their minds"'. An admirer of Eastern philosophy and culture, Butts claims that the 'provincialism' of this racist comment is what 'at last [...] decided [her]' against Eliot. See Butts, *Journals*, September 1927, p. 265. Her decision against him could have been influenced by other factors as well, including Eliot's refusal to write an introduction for *Ashe of Rings*, despite his pronounced esteem for this work (Blondel, *Scenes*, p. 416). In his post as editor of *The Criterion*, Eliot had also rejected a number of Butts's stories in 1925. See Blondel, *Scenes*, p. 141.

¹²³ A number of contemporary reviews praised the evocative vigour of Butts's technique in *Armed with Madness*. See Eugene Lohrke, 'Cups and Spears', *New York Herald Tribune* (10 June 1928), p. 16; Gerald Gould, 'Novelists and a Humorist: Queer Birds', *News Chronicle* (18 June 1928).

¹²⁴ Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', p. 363.

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mirrors her family estate Salterns and Sennen Cove in Cornwall, where Butts is buried.¹²⁵

When Butts relocated to Sennen Cove during the 1930s she avows this unconditional acceptance of her highly charged surroundings:

[w]e got here, about 2 weeks ago, and have been enchanted with enjoyment ever since. It's a fantastic place, not in the least like England, rich and secret and haunted [...] I quite understand how otherwise respectable writers fall right down and write books on Cornwall. And why D. H. Lawrence loved it.¹²⁶

H.D. noted a similar quality in their work: 'I miss something now of the American timbre in almost all English writing – not [...] Butts, that is some sort of almost Druidic thing, Lawrence also had it [...] the Druidic is fine psychic flower and eternal'.¹²⁷ Cornwall, according to Somers in Lawrence's *Kangaroo*, is a 'country that makes a man psychic' (K, p. 226). Butts may have remembered Lawrence's account of twilight communing with 'the west of Cornwall' given that it also informs his portrayal of Egdon Heath in the *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914): '[t]he Heath threw forth its shaggy heather and furze and fern, clean into being'; the 'dark soil was strong and crude and organic as the body of a beast'.¹²⁸ Egdon Heath is much more than a tract of common land, producing familiar rough herbage. To Lawrence, Egdon typifies the tangible physical world as a numinous presence.¹²⁹ *Armed with*

¹²⁵ Tony Butts registered how his sister's 'totemic, magical and symbolic' sites in this novel echoes the imaginative intensity of Salterns in Dorset. See Tony Butts to Mary Butts, undated [autumn 1932], Butts papers.

¹²⁶ Letter from Mary Butts to Angus Davidson, 8 February 1932 (Beinecke).

¹²⁷ H. D. to Bryher, 30 August 1935, Bryher Papers. D. H. Lawrence stayed in Cornwall during the First World War, a period delineated in *Kangaroo*, which mentions 'Druidical' potencies that Butts found immediately compelling: '[a]nd then the Cornish night would gradually come down upon the dark, shaggy moors, that were like the fur of some beast, and upon the pale-grey granite masses, so ancient and Druidical [...] he felt he was over the border, in another world. Over the border, in that twilit, awesome world of the previous Celts. The spirit of the ancient, pre-Christian world, which lingers still in the truly Celtic places, he could feel it invade him in the savage dusk, making him savage too, and at the same time, strangely sensitive and subtle, understanding the mystery of the blood-sacrifice: to sacrifice one's victim, and let the blood run to the fire [...] and at the same time to understand most sensitively the dark flicker of animal life about him, even in a bat'. (K, p. 237)

¹²⁸ D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, p. 25. As Lawrence declares in the *Study*: '[t]his is the constant revelation in Hardy's novels: that there exists a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it [...] the background of dark, passionate Egdon' (p. 28).

¹²⁹ In the Cornwall of *Kangaroo*, Somers avers that he 'no longer wanted to struggle consciously along, a thought adventurer', but to move away from white, conscious day and 'drift into a sort of blood-darkness, to feel in his blood the thrills and presences of the old, moorland dusk' (K, p. 238). As Lawrence reflects, 'the moors looking primeval, and the huge granite boulders bulging

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Madness conjures up this terrain, 'the Heath [...] purple and endless [...] covered with a gauze of every variety of heather, the sweet blood-bright burning crop out of which the honey wine was made'. (*AWM*, p. 41) However, it is to Butts's female protagonists, yearning to become votaries in a larger nonhuman drama, that this energy is vouchsafed.

In *Armed with Madness* Butts fuses elements from two separate cultural traditions (Hellenic mythology and the Grail legend) to concoct a unique conception of Persephone for a ravaged interwar England in bewildered search of new national narratives. The Grail itself has the potential to symbolise opposing impulses, a hybrid device with both pagan and Christian heritage, signifying equally both the passion of the Christian dying god and the fecund womb of an earlier pagan earth-goddess.¹³⁰ This potential contradiction in a primal divinity, uniting elements of Judeo-Christian spirituality with a matrilineally pagan splendour is not out of step with Butts's artistic experiment. *Armed with Madness* repeatedly calls attention to the cup's riddling, tentative provisionality; as one character peevishly comments 'it's anything or nothing' (*AWM*, p. 44).¹³¹ The 'inconclusive' jade cup (*AWM*, p. 67), with its tortuous tangle of associations and usages, has no inherent significance but supplies an irresistible stimulus for mythical 'adventures' that are 'like patterns of another adventure, going on somewhere else all the time' (*AWM*, p. 31).¹³² Employing motifs borrowed from the Grail

out of the earth like presences. So easy to realise men worshipping stones. It is not the stone. It is the mystery of the powerful, pre-human earth, showing its might' (*K*, p. 225).

¹³⁰ The Grail forms part of a death tableau when depicted as the container in which Joseph of Arimathea caught the falling blood of the crucified saviour. The Grail figures as a source of life when portrayed as a cornucopia or as an icon with magical healing powers. Its shape (most frequently a cup or bowl), and nearly invariable pairing with a magical, blood-dripping spear, points toward its role as a symbol of female sexuality and reproduction, yet its hollow interior makes it a ready symbol for emptiness.

¹³¹ In *Armed with Madness*, Butts exploits thoroughly the complexity of this symbol. While all grail-shaped objects mentioned in *The Waste Land* (the 'empty cisterns' and 'exhausted wells', for instance) seem to possess roughly the same symbolic content, the meaning of grail artefacts constantly shifts in Butts's narrative. She promotes a proliferation of grail associations because she wishes to demonstrate both how warring forces can coexist within a single trinket, and how the yield of a symbolic container is affected by what is brought to and placed inside that vessel. When, early on in *Armed with Madness*, the Taverner friends play the 'Freud game' (*AWM*, p. 29) to explain the Sanc Grail to Carston their new visitor, each group member produces a comment or recollection about the grail that is mediated by individual temperament, position, and interests.

¹³² The specific cup found by the Taverner clique in Tollerdown well itself has multiple purposes and identities. It might be the Sanc Grail, but it might also be an Indian rajah's poison cup. While it may have held once the 'blessed sacrament', the cup has also, more certainly and more recently, served as a dying mistress's spittoon. Unsure whether the cup in question is holy or unholy, and also whether it is genuine or a hoax, the Taverner clan make awkward jokes while employing their 'grail' as an ash tray and a glass for whisky and soda (*AWM*, p. 37).

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legend, Butts's Persephone embarks on a journey into England's indigenous past that is marked by the oddly reactionary standards of historical continuity found in *Ashe of Rings* which privileges Dorset's native population as sturdy racial survivors of a chivalric epoch.

Armed with Madness is driven by an anxious feeling that, no longer rooted in a specific, clearly defined place or culture, itinerant citizens of the world are '[w]ithout faith' (AWM, p. 9). As an antidote to this grievous inadequacy, Butts conjoins the traditions of ancient Greece and Arthurian legend in order to finesse a reinvigorated chronicle of Englishness, extolling femininity as a means of harnessing the primal vigour of mystical experience through dissemination of ritualistic practice.¹³³ Butts's journals evince a sustained interest in the period's widespread cultural preoccupation with the Grail, and *Armed with Madness* reworks the current anthropological idiom to mirror a revival of medievalism. In both *Armed with Madness* and *Felicity Taverner* the concept of the Grail haunts and organises the narrative: each text uses this paradigm of fertility as a framework for transcendent vision.

Butts portrays the divinity's urgent search for legitimate English roots as neither definite nor guaranteed in a world devoid of inherent values. Instead *Armed with Madness* denotes the daunting deferral of stable meaning: '[a] piece of worn jade [...] the question mark to the question we can none of us answer' (AWM, p. 137). Both conceptually and topographically 'the thing was off the map' (AWM, p. 53); the object nonetheless facilitates a 'pilgrimage' (AWM, p. 81) into prehistoric strata that demonstrates to the characters how 'old patterns repeat themselves' (AWM, p. 16). However much the novel proclaims its vehement investment in Harrison's Hellenic notions of collective re-enactment, what ultimately impels the modern Persephone is an instinctual yearning to rehabilitate a pastoral ideal of rustic Dorset enshrined in a myth of 'medievalis[m]' (AWM, p. 89).

Like *Felicity Taverner*, *Armed with Madness* acclaims a female protagonist who affords a generative link to the blessedness of ancestral lands. Scylla is not just a fertility deity devoted to the '[d]iscovery of a new value, a different way of apprehending everything' (AWM, p. 9) but is also 'damsel of the Sanc-Grail' (AWM, p. 44), implying Butts's prototypical Persephone Vanna in *Ashe of Rings* who holds the 'riches' of 'the sanc-grail' (AR, p. 129). Butts formulates a belligerently modish version of Persephone: Scylla wears make-up (AWM, p. 9), sports '[g]reen pointed feet in plaited shoes' (AWM, p. 33), adores luxurious trinkets (AWM, p. 53) while

¹³³ Mary Baine Campbell discusses the popularity of Arthurian objects during the interwar period and their appropriation by fascists obsessed with lineage. See 'Finding the Grail: Fascist Aesthetics and Mysterious Objects', in *King Arthur's Modern Return*, ed. by Debra N. Mancoff (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 213-25.

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simultaneously assuming mythic proportions: her brother Felix hints that she is the sort of woman ‘who’d have mothered the house of Atreus’ (AWM, p. 19), an allusion to a Greek myth that incorporates adultery, incest, infanticide, and cannibalism.

Scylla’s name also resonates with the fearsome image of the *Odyssey*’s six-headed, female sea-monster who lived in a cave on the side of a cliff and who devoured passing seamen.¹³⁴ This intricate constellation of associations captures Scylla’s mythic potency, but she is aligned primarily with the verdant and the beneficent, a fact underscored by her comparison to the Norse mother goddess Iduna – custodian of the golden apples of youth. Like the Grail itself, Scylla is elusive, the only woman in a coterie of five men, and therefore ‘a point of reflection’ (AWM, p. 15). Structurally, the Grail and Scylla – ‘a living cup’ (AWM, p. 38) – occupy analogous positions: each identified with prodigal fecundity and with the glorious recuperation, in Weston’s terminology, of ‘the Waste Land’. Whereas orthodox accounts of the Grail saga delineate the righteous strength of a visionary masculinity, *Armed with Madness* insists on the dominance of a female archetype like Persephone by making Scylla the symbolic locus of meaning, who can encourage others to cultivate multiplied perception, ‘a state of consciousness unique [...] Not vision, but wonder become a state, an impregnation of being’ (AWM, p. 140).¹³⁵ Thus she reminds us of Harrison’s contention that ‘above even Zeus the Father’ is the ‘Great Mother’ who stands for the ‘collective

¹³⁴ ‘They called her Scylla from her name Drusilla, altering it because they said she was sometimes a witch and sometimes a bitch’ (AWM, p. 4). The name also returns the reader to Greek lore – initially to *The Odyssey* (12. 235) and the formidable daughter of Crataeis, who dwelt in a cavern along the straits of Sicily, the rending, mangling, troubling face of the sea. At the beginning of *Armed with Madness*, there is a slight, but playfully suggestive, reference to Poseidon: ‘[s]omething long and white came up behind them out of the sea’ (AWM, p. 6). Poseidon, violent in his love, made advances on Scylla, the daughter of Phorcys and Hecate (Butts impishly links Scylla with Hecate in *Armed with Madness*: ‘the triple figure, like Hecate the witch, amused, imaginative’ (AWM, p. 6). Amphitrite was jealous and threw magic herbs into Scylla’s bathing place and Scylla was metamorphosed into a monster. Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 13. 917-68; 14. 1-71) chronicles this same story about Glaucus, a mortal who was transformed into a sea-god. It was he who fell in love with Scylla; when he was rejected, he turned to the sorceress Circe for assistance. But Circe fell in love with him and in her jealousy poisoned the waters of Scylla’s bathing place. Drusilla, on the other hand, evokes the *Acts of the Apostles* (24) in which St. Paul defends himself and his belief in Christ so robustly that he frightens the procurator Felix and his wife Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and sister of Herod Agrippa II.

¹³⁵ This formulation is complicated by Scylla’s status as a triple-figured ‘Hecate’ – here amused and imaginative – descended from the Titans, who is a deity of roads in general and crossroads in particular, the latter being considered the centre of ghostly activities, especially in the dead of night. Thus the goddess developed a terrifying aspect; triple-faced statues portrayed the three manifestations of her multiple character as a deity of the moon – Selene in heaven, Artemis on earth, and Hecate in the realm of Hades. This is a very different notion from that of the young, vigorous and wholesome beauty of Artemis.

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conscience'.¹³⁶ Critics register the novel's self-assured placement of woman's agency as central to the enterprise of cultural regeneration, denoting how she can intervene in, and radically remodel, the nation's historical and mythic narratives. But this message is refined through an exclusionary depiction of Englishness founded upon a proto-fascist politics of race, genetics, and heterosexuality.¹³⁷

Armed with Madness racialises the primeval contours of Dorset landscape, such as the 'white porcelain rings' (AWM, p. 8) that Scylla encounters on a stroll through the downs. All of the men – except Clarence, who is black (AWM, p. 14) – have a skin colour matching 'the moon's palette' (AWM, p. 14), while Scylla has 'white shoulder[s]', and 'rose feet' (AWM, p. 153), and blonde 'moon-fair hair' (AWM, p. 145). Clarence's blackness and homosexuality are keys to apprehending *Armed with Madness*'s quasi-crucifixion scene. Fuelled by jealous rage over losing 'his set-piece, his jewel' (AWM, p. 87) Picus¹³⁸ to Scylla, Clarence ties her body to a clay statue of her lover and ritualistically flings arrows at her until she bleeds, then faints. The language describing this assault highlights Scylla's status as eroticised spectacle, her body indistinguishable from the greenish clay statue pricked with white feathers that Clarence has moulded: '[an arrow] ripped the skin on her shoulder and entered the clay' (AWM, p. 145). This climactic moment is presaged in an earlier episode in which Clarence obsessively sketches Scylla on huge sheets of paper in charcoal, 'obscenely and savagely contorted' (AWM, p. 129), then pierces the 'bodies of his paper martyrs' (AWM, p. 130). Scrutinised through the interpretive 'lens' of Harrison's thinking on ritual, Clarence's actions approximate to an attempt to purge himself, and the wider community, of what he perceives to be Scylla's baleful and corrupting manoeuvres.

A cursory reading of this quasi-crucifixion of a fertility deity suggests Butts is uncovering affiliations between the mystical savage and the irrational excesses of the artist's sensibility, a link Harrison explains when she contends that art, like ritual, arises out of inchoate and nebulous emotional impulses. This would portray Scylla as dangerous contaminant and Clarence

¹³⁶ Harrison, *Themis*, p. xxii; p. 539, and p. 487.

¹³⁷ See Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹³⁸ Jane Harrison recounts the rich resonances of the name Picus: 'Picus was an oracular bird, a tree guardian, a guardian of kings; he was also a king, king over a kingdom ancient and august [...] In the figure of Picus are united, or rather as yet undifferentiated, king and daimon, if not god [...] Finally, Picus enshrines a beautiful lost faith, the faith that birds and beasts are mana and sometimes stronger than the mana of man. The notion that by watching a bird you can divine the weather is preceded by the far more primitive notion that the bird by his mana actually makes the weather, makes and brings the rain, the thunder, the sunshine and the spring'. See Harrison, *Themis*, pp. 104-10.

the heroic emissary of cathartic liberation, a view lent credibility given the ominous mythic associations of her Christian name.¹³⁹ But Clarence is actually the tortured malefactor for seeking her expulsion. Butts opines in *Warning to Hikers* that rites can stem from 'ill-health of the soul' (*WH*, p. 31), for Clarence appears erratic, withdrawn, incoherent and even 'mad' (*AWM*, p. 129) to many characters. Clarence is a veteran of the Great War and Butts seems to imply that his post-traumatic stress disorder, coupled with his homosexuality, makes him acutely vulnerable to a primitive stage of derangement and sadistic cruelty. He becomes trapped in 'a deadly grey land' of 'infinite suffering' (*AWM*, p. 65).

Clarence's ruthless treatment of Scylla also illustrates the clinical verdict, defended by Richard Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, of a crucial psychosexual link between sadomasochism and homosexuality. Where the other characters enact modern forms of ritual and remain civilised, Clarence cannot; his indulgence in 'race sadism' (*AWM*, p. 153) signals he is too atavistic and too 'black' to transgress the boundary and return unscathed. His blackness is associated with the netherworld as a site of spiritual torment; his jibe at both Scylla and the Grail is telling: 'down the well, where the cup came' is the 'best place for you' (*AWM*, p. 144), a key moment that brings together the novel's two stories (the love affair and the cup saga), manifesting the interchangeable status of the fertility deity and the Grail.

The Grail-cup is a stark 'reminder' (*AWM*, p. 21) that behind the images of cultural malaise and decay – precisely those images personified by Clarence through his alignment with non-procreative, 'deviant' sexuality and the rampant bestialities of war – 'another truth' (*AWM*, p. 25) exists, a truth that finds its inspiration in a heterosexually conceived notion of spiritual renewal posited on Scylla's whiteness and bodily plenitude: she 'broods' situations 'and they hatch' (*AWM*, p. 20). Butts's fascination with the ancient fertility goddess is related to the belief in historical, cultural, and ancestral connections to place, seeing the advance of suburban housing, commercial expansion, garish American advertising, and Hollywood cinema as elements of encroachment on the purity of southwest England. Banished to a 'deadly grey land' (*AWM*, p. 65), Clarence inhabits a liminal zone that offers no hope

¹³⁹ Scylla is viewed as the six-headed, man-eating monster of *The Odyssey* by her spiritually bankrupt and confused brother and by Clarence. Scylla also recalls the myth of Scylla, daughter of Nisus. In this myth Scylla is willing to deliver her father and the kingdom into the hands of King Minos, with whom she has fallen helplessly in love, only to be treated with disdain and revulsion and finally rejection. In both myths Scylla does not fare well. However, Butts's Scylla has an immense capacity for love, as did the daughter of Nisus. Scylla heals with that love. Butts incorporates both myths, transmuting the idea of the destructive force of passion into a positive. Her capacity for forgiveness develops as an extension of love, battling 'sinister forces' with 'the good, the pure, the true' and the clean, natural sensuousness of her locale.

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of organic unity. Nor can he traverse the 'white' and 'green road' (*AWM*, p. 10) that leads to Gault House.

For Butts the Persephone myth extols heterosexuality through its indissoluble connection with Scylla's role as 'procreative earth goddess'.¹⁴⁰ Like Scylla herself, whose body furnishes a genealogical link to English prehistory, 'the earth was a map of naked beauty' (*AWM*, p. 72): a vision for those fortunate few equipped to decode the abstruse symbols of its timeless topography. Although she recalls a homoerotic dalliance with Lydia, Scylla's ultimate allegiance is to Picus. The unarticulated yet embedded cultural conviction is that without the female fertility figure, and her reproductive majesty, 'authentic' England cannot survive, let alone thrive. The sexual imagery of the Grail-cup speaks directly to this concern, as does the novel's invocation of the lance, which was initially employed by Picus (who begins the search) to pierce the cup and haul it from the bottom of the well. Harrison's thesis that the mythological figure of Picus is aligned with 'mana' evidences that Picus personifies a heterosexually reverent plan for cultural resurgence. This delineation of reproductive vitality seems complicated by his homoerotically charged remark: '[i]t was Clarence's spear that started me [on the grail hunt]' (*AWM*, p. 140). Yet the moment is subverted by Picus's close links to mythic structures that espouse a bucolic milieu and hence underwrites the symbol's heterosexual connotation.

VII

In *Death of Felicity Taverner*,¹⁴¹ Butts retains several characters from *Armed with Madness*, fusing the mythic elements of a healing and heroic fertility deity in the figures of Scylla and Felicity, with that of the 'Hades' interloper, the 'fabricated man' (*DFT*, p. 303) Nick Kralin

A mourning somewhere in creation that the freshest earth there is should lose its maidenhood, become handled and subservient to man, to the men who would follow Nick Kralin. "Felicity is dead, and her land is to die too." (*DFT*, p. 249)

¹⁴⁰ Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, p. 214.

¹⁴¹ The critical consensus tends to situate *Armed with Madness* as a classically high modernist text given its obvious formal innovations and thematic range. Scholarly responses to *Death of Felicity Taverner* are more muted because it marks a turn towards conventional realism. But the novel's more linear narrative belies its other experimental components. The assumption of linearity is complicated both by the novel's absent centre (Felicity is already dead when the novel opens) and by its unmarked moves from omniscient third-person narration to first-person interior monologue.

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The shadow of commercial development of the land sacred to the Taverners informs Butts's preoccupation with the genuine loss, or perversion of a natural Dorset locale. Refining the mythic structure of the earlier novel, Butts raises the dead Felicity and her memory to the level of earth goddess – a Persephone to be treasured and sought after for the standard of beauty in small things she once exemplified. The task of safeguarding her memory and her consecrated domain on the isolated, southwest English coast falls to her cousin Scylla, Picus (now Scylla's husband), and Scylla's brother Felix. When Boris Polteratsky from *Armed with Madness* returns in *Felicity Taverner* to help resolve the mystery surrounding Felicity's disappearance, the novel shifts from the stable rhythms of domestic realism to the purely mythical, again improvising around Harrison's research into primitive ritual practice. *Felicity Taverner* elevates Boris's murder of Kralin to the level of ritual sacrifice, thus playing down the cold-blooded calculation of the ploy itself. These works crystallise a darker and more troubling facet of Butts's fiction by combining and transforming homicide into ritual preservation.

Death of Felicity Taverner is self-consciously fashioned as a convoluted crime puzzle or a 'detective story of high merit' (*DFT*, p. 221) in which the freakish circumstances surrounding Felicity's demise and the significance of her missing body are key.¹⁴² Whereas a conventional detective plot strives to uncover and bring all secrets into the open, Butts's novel concludes with a murder that must remain an impenetrable mystery, a sacrificial slaughter to ward off the threat of desiccation that menaces the Dorset countryside. As in *Armed with Madness*, similarly fuelled by the desire to restore a precious artefact to its rightful place, *Felicity Taverner* relates the restless quest for a central absence severed from its regional English roots. The sacred object that 'had been lost out of the world' (*AWM*, p. 79) is Felicity herself, a metonymic Grail to the extent that she is voiceless, submerged, and inchoate.¹⁴³

In *Felicity Taverner*, Butts reprises themes established in *Ashe of Rings*, where a primordial grasp of bloodlines underpins a sense of local affiliation. The patrician family 'home' starts to resemble a museum, even a mausoleum,

¹⁴² On the popularity of detective fiction during this interwar period see Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 62-112.

¹⁴³ On the intricate ties between the Grail and femininity, see Sherlyn Abdo, 'Woman as Grail in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*', *Centennial Review*, 28 (1984), 48-60; Susan Aronstein, 'Rewriting Percival's Sister: Eucharistic Vision and Typological Destiny in the *Queste del San Graal*', *Women's Studies*, 21 (1992), 211-30; Donald L. Hoffman, 'Percival's Sister: Malory's "Rejected" Masculinities', *Arthuriana*, 6 (1996), 72-83; Rosalyn Rossingnol, 'The Holiest Vessel: Maternal Aspects of the Grail', *Arthuriana*, 5 (1995), 52-61; Christine Poulson, *The Quest for the Grail: Arthurian Legend in British Art 1840-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

viewed both aesthetically and as a discrete space that could fade away forever if its artefacts are not properly policed. As in *Ashe*, where marrying outside the clan introduces a pollutant ('our race has become impure'), *Felicity Taverner* exposes the catastrophic effects of an exogamous union, coupling with a demonised 'outsider'. In both cases, the 'tribal instincts' of the family permit shelter from the unceasing encroachment of alien forces, a '[s]anctuary of [the] race' (*AR*, pp. 149, 187). Butts invokes primitivist discourse to connote the ageless roots of the Taverner clan, referring to them as country-bred people who, like their forefathers, made only infrequent forays into cities and then just for crucial amenities before returning to their land 'as head-hunters [...] to examine spoil, but never as though their home could be anywhere else' (*DFT*, p. 299). Felicity's relations are exponents of 'tribal hunting' (*DFT*, p. 230) whose goal is to uphold English 'race-solidarity' (*DFT*, p. 272).¹⁴⁴

Like *Armed with Madness*, *Felicity Taverner* reverts to the familiar trope of women and nature, though in striking contrast to her male contemporaries, for whom the linkage served to demean and trivialise feminine mental faculties, Butts denotes that the 'primitive' nature of women is 'exquisitely civilised' (*DFT*, p. 343), enabling them to become redoubtable navigators of 'international waters, not properly charted' (*DFT*, p. 314) by the uninitiated. In this ecological allegory women are ideally qualified to become moral instructors of a nation slowly recovering from the existential shock of global convulsion. It is Felicity herself who is locus of this primitive spirituality, the earth-goddess through whom the novel's ideological struggles are played out and uneasily resolved. Felicity, despite her marriage to the Russian Jew Kralin, functions in a fantasy of territorial appropriation by personifying finally 'the beauty of England' (*DFT*, p. 285).

This genetic model is problematised by Julia Taverner, Felicity's crooked mother, a debased Demeter who punctures this august ideal of the English family through her malicious collusion with Kralin against her own daughter, offering him 'a few Taverner scalps' (*DFT*, p. 253) as appeasement.¹⁴⁵ The Taverners display a myopic concern with 'nation-breeding doings' of only a modest 'part of an English shire' (*DFT*, p. 301), yet Butts signals how this petty provinciality helps the family's national roots prosper and withstand a

¹⁴⁴ The Taverner family foster a pastoral ideal and identify with the cultural roots of English resistance to industrialisation, a profoundly insular model of nationality, one that hinges on the idea of racial essence to signal how only elite members of the clan have access to England's ancient and mythic legacy.

¹⁴⁵ Butts's use of the vocabulary of the tribe ironically suggests Franz Fanon's warning as to the dangers posed to national unity when 'the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state'. See *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), pp. 148-49.

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panoply of social ills. In contrast to Kralin, who, like Clarence in *Armed with Madness*, 'has no known history behind him' (*DFT*, p. 315), the Taverners venerate the archives of what Butts elsewhere labels 'Country History'.¹⁴⁶

Scylla continues her role as priestly initiate and seer from *Armed with Madness*, and puts her sharpened awareness to work by devoting her life to a wildly ambitious book project, which charts and ratifies the private history of those who traversed her blessed locality:

Scylla's passion [...] was – spending if necessary her life over it – to leave behind her the full chronicle of their part of England, tell its 'historie' with the candour and curiosity, the research and imagination and what today might pass for credulity of a parish Herodotus. There was material there, for ten miles round about them, which had not been touched; not only manor rolls and church registers or the traditions which get themselves tourist-books. She had access to sources, histories of houses, histories of families, to memories that were like visions, to visions which seemed to have to do with memory. To her the people talked, the young as well as the old; and there were times when the trees and stones and turf were not dumb, and she had their speech [...] She did not know how she knew, Kilmeny's daughter, only what it looked like – the speechless sight of it – her thread to the use of the historic imagination, Ariadne to no Minotaur in the country of the Sanc Grail. (*DFT*, pp. 299-300)

In this distinctive historiography the Taverner family estate becomes a structured embodiment of the true and essential past. Butts's Persephone presides over this intimate and personal realm in which aesthetic excellence, coupled with a keen apprehension of culture and civility, become core principles in constellating a new Albion. Scylla draws from a voluminous range of sources, both conventional and unorthodox, in order to 'leave behind her the full chronicle of [the family's] part of England' (*DFT*, p. 300).¹⁴⁷ Scylla's venture is reminiscent of the eponymous protagonist's antiquarian enterprise in John Cowper Powys's West Country novel *Wolf Solent* (1929):

'Our History will be an entirely new genre', Mr Urquhart was saying. 'What I want to do is to isolate the particular portion of the earth's surface called "Dorset"; as if it were possible to decipher there a palimpsest of successive strata, one inscribed below another, of human impression. Such impressions are for every being made and for every being obliterated in the ebb and flow of events; and the chronicle of them should be continuous, not episodic'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Butts, 'Green', p. 64.

¹⁴⁷ To the extent that Scylla's book-in-progress elides the distinction between official and unofficial history, pursuing investigations of the past that fall beyond the margins of historical records, she typifies the modernist fascination with foregrounding 'subjectivity and perspectivalism at the root of historical knowledge'. See Melba Cuddy Keane, 'Virginia Woolf and the Varieties of Historicist Experience', in *Virginia Woolf and the Essay*, ed. by Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 59-77.

¹⁴⁸ John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 45.

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Scylla's literary testimony is actually a more elastic and inclusive rehearsal of 'the historic imagination' (*DFT*, p. 300), foregrounding women's domestic rituals and mystical promptings. Scylla assiduously deciphers the speech of 'trees and stones and turf' (*DFT*, p. 300), calm in the knowledge that embedded in the estate are profound genealogical survivals of an entire panorama of the human past. She is able to perceive the 'speechless sight' (*DFT*, p. 300) of things that appear not to be there, adopting a double perspective merging verifiable concrete evidence with flights of visionary trance: 'she saw their land as an exfoliation, not happening in our kind of time, a becoming of the perfected' (*DFT*, p. 300). Scylla's exclusive access to southwest England's phantasmic 'historie' (*DFT*, p. 299) remains unexplained, for even she herself does 'not know how she knew' (*DFT*, p. 300) about the existence of temporal anomalies and alternative geographical spheres.

Scylla, as both gifted storyteller (*DFT*, p. 168) and indefatigable archivist, lavishly details the Taverner family as a precious repository of national history, but she is not blind to the psychopathologies of that fraught hereditary alliance. Despite the text's stinging attack upon the clan's wanton aberrations – the Taverner coat of arms is an image of gruesome self-devouring: 'a snake with its tail in its mouth' (*DFT*, p. 200) – Butts still conserves the genetic family as a trusted receptacle of England's authentic past.¹⁴⁹ Even Julia Taverner, 'the original bitch' (*DFT*, p. 171), evinces a deep love for the 'great gentry' (*DFT*, p. 196) which has made 'this bit of England' (*DFT*, p. 258) its home.

The Taverners' fevered devotion to the Dorset countryside discloses a perception of the landscape as a kind of imprint, in which nature's 'pattern was repeated in them, the stuff of a country made into man' (*DFT*, p. 339). As Julia describes it, the earth is 'strictly of their flesh' to the extent that 'leaf and air and water had nourished their bodies' (*DFT*, pp. 258-59). This merging of the boundary between the body and its rustic environs is even more pronounced in the characterisation of Felicity as the biological component of 'Taverner-land' (*DFT*, p. 339). Besieged custodians of the landed status quo, the Taverners occupy two properties that are centuries old, held by the family over many generations, ensconced in 'the most ancient part of the wood' (*DFT*, p. 165); Scylla and Picus inhabit one, while the other belongs to the dead Felicity. These homes, and the 'Sacred Wood' (*DFT*, p. 340) encircling them, are the Taverners' 'blood-link' (*DFT*, p. 174) to the 'old part of oldest England' (*DFT*, p. 340).

The Taverners, because of a historical trajectory of ceaseless flux (urban encroachment, suburbanisation, commercial exploitation), are compelled to

¹⁴⁹ Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, p. 218.

acknowledge the disintegration of their venerable estate. In *Felicity Taverner* this challenge to the family's inheritance is personified by Kralin, the speculative capitalist who aims to desecrate Felicity's home by converting it into his 'personal nucleus' (*DFT*, p. 249); he wants to purchase the surrounding land and construct a hotel, holiday bungalows and a golf course on the family's sacred soil.¹⁵⁰ Among Kralin's many crimes are his plans to advertise this development and blackmail the family into compliance by threatening to publish what he alleges are Felicity's sexually explicit personal papers.

In touch with numinous, invisible emanations from her Dorset milieu, Felicity appears repeatedly as a ghost whose love for her landed estate is rooted in a conception of timeless continuity not only with the regional past but also with a proud, though obscured 'national tradition'.¹⁵¹ The figure of the murdered Felicity's spectre recalls Harrison's discussion of primitive ritual, in which 'blood, once shed on the earth, poisoned the earth' and required 'purification for blood-guilt'.¹⁵² Felicity as an apparition radiates primarily wistful craving, her 'ghost's eyes looked out under a frown' (*DFT*, p. 321), and signals her presence through mild ripples of activity across the surface of the downs (*DFT*, p. 323). In addition, Felicity's presence is strongly felt in her home, whose interiors – brushed by her spectral fingertips – are marked indelibly with 'passion and death' (*DFT*, p. 181). As Scylla, Felix, and Boris sift their own vivid memories of her, the room seemed to move 'to some uncharted place', as sometimes '[h]appy lovers' imagine themselves visiting 'countries which lie east of the sun, west of the moon' (*DFT*, p. 181). The geographical metaphor denotes that Felicity's sexuality occupies uncharted imaginative terrain, but also evokes England's sinister colonising appetites, its unrelenting drive to subsume distant outposts. Butts deploys the robust rhetoric of territorial expansionism to capture how Felicity negotiates both the material and the metaphysical domains, destabilising the invisible border dividing the two. The making of this goddess involves a 'perception not easy to discuss for lack of terms' (*DFT*, p. 181).

Refusing to be confined by the framework of conventional discourse, Felicity cannot be explained through precise historical markers either. Felix avers that in order to distil the essence of Felicity's ambiguous potency one needs to privilege the elements of metaphor and analogy: '[i]f a crystal became a white narcissus, you'd have something like her' (*DFT*, p. 169). The

¹⁵⁰ Kralin's threat of creating 'snowstorms' of litter are like those which C. E. M. Joad reported having seen all over Sennen Cove in an article published the year after Butts's death. See Joad, 'The People's Claim', in *Britain and the Beast*, ed. by Clough Williams-Ellis (London, 1938), p. 72.

¹⁵¹ Butts, *Journals*, 13 January 1937, p. 467.

¹⁵² Harrison, *Religion of Ancient Greece*, pp. 42, 44.

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metamorphic nature of this imagery recalls her inherent instability as well as her associations with English purity. Either absent through death or present as a revenant, Felicity exemplifies the gravitational pull of English pastoral idealism; her cultural identity, like that of the nation, defines itself through the smothering of that which threatens to corrode it: namely, the Jew Kralin, a 'town-bred' and 'mechanical' evil (*DFT*, pp. 302-3).

The nature of Felicity's sexual memoirs, like the circumstances surrounding her death, comprises the two central mysteries that fuel the narrative. By melding the questions surrounding Felicity's sudden disappearance with the enigmatic nature of her sexuality – by what standards would she be deemed 'virtuous' or 'debauched'? – Butts signifies that the cultural comprehension of female desire is itself a lacuna. As Scylla remarks, '[w]hen Felicity started an affair, it was somehow outside the rules' (*DFT*, p. 172). Like her 'torn and strewn members' discovered along the roadside and which have to be 'collected' and 'laid out', the narrative is replete with slippery, suggestive 'omissions', radical indeterminacies, and glaring gaps that divulge a different 'version of the truth' (*DFT*, p. 168) regarding Felicity's body.

Like the Grail itself, which typifies and welcomes the possibility of narrative progression, Felicity's absence is the 'occasion for a good story' (*DFT*, p. 168) driving the other characters' quest for numinous meaning. What we learn about Felicity and her death at age 33, we gather in telling fragments: when the novel opens she has already been dead for four months (*DFT*, p. 170); her body has been cremated (*DFT*, p. 168) and people speculate about the possibility of suicide (*DFT*, p. 166) and even murder (*DFT*, p. 184). From Scylla we learn of Felicity's exquisite beauty and grace, traits Picus also registers when he thinks about her 'before her mirror, just out of her bath' (*DFT*, p. 197). This is an image of Felicity as object of voyeuristic enjoyment – a traditional role simultaneously observed and exhibited. Such a focus on glamorous spectacle is also evinced in Felix's remark that 'it seemed as though great houses had been built to display her' (*DFT*, p. 169).

Felicity's status as a modern Persephone is a riddling paradox; though there are myriad references to her cultured poise and love of self-adornment – her Lanvin dresses, bangles of jade and crystal – she is no petty narcissist. Scylla describes her cousin as 'dis-interested and without pretension' (*DFT*, p. 169). This is reminiscent of Butts's illustration of Nature as 'indifferent' in *Warning to Hikers*, signifying Felicity's cool detachment from physical actuality, even as she appears ensnared within the flamboyant trappings of extrovert femininity. Although she eschews work (despite repeated references to her supposed poverty), Felicity does have secure employment: '[h]er occupation was to be lovely and exquisite [...] to understand things

and to love' (*DFT*, p. 182) – to foster the stewardship of her class. Although the novel exploits theological discourse to fortify Felicity's 'genius for love' (*DFT*, p. 330), it is a highly charged and dissident portrayal which foregrounds bodily desire and links eroticism to the sacred. From Boris, we discover that Felicity 'was a woman made for a particular kind of love, a love that [...] [r]ecognises no God with her for priestess' (*DFT*, p. 188).

This reference to Felicity as 'priestess' of a Godless universe, and Boris's passion for her as a 'mystery' – something 'outside our range [...] a woman who was a miracle' (*DFT*, p. 170) – underscores her resemblance to Scylla. For Butts, Persephone derives her potency from her restless sexuality, and each woman is something other than what she initially seems to be. Scylla captures not only Felicity's duplicity, but also alludes to her cousin's mythic stature, when she confides to Boris: 'I've somehow got from you a double image of her. One like a cameo, cut delicately, and then another, a terrible duplicate, over life-size, Io, Hathor or some such divine simplification' (*DFT*, p. 187). Felicity occupies a position structurally similar to that of Scylla in that she does not completely apprehend the dangerous 'power' (*DFT*, p. 189) conferred upon her. Felicity is like the Grail: she 'came out of Paradise' and navigates the earth to assist 'people who could not find their way [back] in' (*DFT*, p. 180).

To Felicity's chthonic energy, no single consistent layer of significance is attached: she is by turns 'distinctly chaste' (*DFT*, p. 172) yet also 'a scandalous piece' of work (*DFT*, p. 183), an 'erotic expert' (*DFT*, p. 260) with 'disgraceful knowledge' (*DFT*, p. 323). Felicity anticipates Luce Irigaray's conception of the inscrutable '*Kore-Persephone*' who

escapes perspective. Her depth, in all its dimensions, never offers itself up to the gaze, whatever the point of view may be. She passes beyond all boundaries [...] Whence the veils which she is supposed to cover herself with so that she may give herself out to be – what she is not.¹⁵³

Butts marshals psychoanalytic rhetoric, such as Felicity supposedly suffering from an 'Electra-complex' (*DFT*, p. 294), to discredit sexological models that masquerade as indubitable scientific truth yet actually promote and preserve traditional male sexual privilege. Butts's abiding interest in the Persephone myth helps her extend an alternative standard for female sexuality, one that

¹⁵³ Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, p. 115. For Irigaray, Persephone epitomises divided femininity only partially captured by patriarchy, a paradoxical being never alone, but dwelling in two mutually exclusive domains as her mother's daughter as well as her husband's wife. Thus Persephone becomes a potentially deceptive figure, never fully comprehended, who inhabits, insofar as she has a self, an ambiguous 'site' between two compelling presences.

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validates women's erotic autonomy and strengthens their ties to a holy portion of southwest England.

Felix sets the tone for Butts's critique when he remarks that 1920s British culture in general and the institutional family unit in particular is mired in shallow sexological concepts, creating '[a] generation that is learning to treat sex only too scientifically' (*DFT*, p. 293). Felicity is said to have had 'an inferiority complex' (*DFT*, p. 180) while her mother's neurotic loathing for independent, spirited, and attractive young women is articulated in terms of repressed jealousy: 'Felicity's life was wholly composed of the excesses she would have liked to have enjoyed', for in contrast to her daughter Julia 'had sacrificed her *jus saturnalia* to God' (*DFT*, p. 189). Julia Taverner, in her myriad chilling cruelties and snubs inflicted upon her dead daughter, functions as a macabre caricature of Demeter's maternal solicitude. Butts's hideous high-Victorian mother figure is castigated for preaching rigid sexual abstinence to Felicity, yet is simultaneously viewed as an undignified dupe of the very structures she purports to uphold (*DFT*, pp. 321-22). Butts, while decrying the language of psychoanalysis, deploys it to demonise Julia Taverner and her 'dirty' (*DFT*, p. 322) obsession with the niceties of sexual etiquette. As Adrian Taverner avers, his mother drilled 'shame' (*DFT*, p. 326) into his young sister, telling Felicity 'she was filthy, when she was clean' (*DFT*, p. 324). Because of Julia's own profound maternal 'abnormality' and repressive 'complex' (*DFT*, p. 322), she is unable to appreciate Felicity's remarkable 'quality of purity' (*DFT*, p. 323). Julia's status as a fearsome and unfeeling Demeter is highlighted by her literal interference with her 'detested' daughter's inheritance of the family estate (*DFT*, p. 312). Butts can thus explore Felicity as a model of female sexuality and inheritance that is not in thrall to, or slavishly dependent upon, principles of conventional reproductive power.

The novel's invocation of the discourse of sexual purity is problematised by the fact that Felicity herself is far from being the quintessence of Kore's unblemished maidenhood, though Felix argues that his cousin 'was most men's friend and very few's lover' (*DFT*, p. 169) and she is explicitly linked with the Greek term '*sophrosyne*' (*DFT*, p. 313), signifying prudence, discretion, and moderation. Kralin recalls the many times his wife deserted him, and his venomous reaction focuses on her supposed savage, unapologetic carnality: '[w]hat business had a woman's body, blood-driven engine for secretion and excretion, to play such tricks' (*DFT*, p. 214). However, Butts inveighs against the only female body ordinarily permitted limited sexual expression – the maternal. Although Felicity is not a mother, her body is integral to the maintenance of the racial stock in rustic Dorset. It is no accident that Picus, alerted to Kralin's scheme to commercialise the undisturbed rural landscape, overhears the earth's dirge, whose lost virginity

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hints at infiltration by foreign contaminants: '[a] mourning somewhere in creation that the freshest earth there is should lose its maidenhood' (*DFT*, p. 249).

The Taverners' wish to conserve Felicity's name from aesthetic vandalism and despoliation, to 'keep her memory bright' (*DFT*, p. 282), functions allegorically as a desire to salvage the estate from Kralin's money-spinning schemes. Not merely a woman but a source of genealogical and national continuation, Felicity was slain because she became 'more dangerous than she knew' (*DFT*, p. 188); like Nature capable of bringing unimaginable devastation as well as generative rekindling. When Kralin avows that 'Felicity is dead, and her land is to die too' (*DFT*, p. 249), the Taverners acknowledge this threat as a second assault on their beloved: 'the land. To them it is part of her – "part of her body"' (*DFT*, p. 330). Implicit in this reaction is the preservationist concern that, because the English countryside is invariably cast as female, her body is violated by interlopers with no respect for the numberless strata of time underlying the modern moment in the life of this terrain. Kralin is the 'lusty bachelor' (*DFT*, p. 211) who assails his dead wife's body by defacing her earth.

As the quintessence of all that Butts considers warped in the modern milieu, Kralin is reminiscent of Henry Wilcox in Forster's *Howards End*: both are canny entrepreneurs driven by squalid self-interest. Immersion in hectic metropolitan rhythms has rendered Kralin's imaginative faculty unduly abstract (*DFT*, p. 242), elevating rationalist precision, excising emotional intensity, and severing detailed alertness to indigenous mores and time-honoured traditions. Kralin brings to this fictional Dorset 'abstractions of machinery, an abstract of the cerebral life of towns' (*DFT*, p. 300). In contrast to the Taverners, whose patrician heritage can be traced through untold generations, Kralin was brought to England through Russian emigration, from the 'under-tow of the world's tides' (*DFT*, p. 314), with people 'of mixed or exiles' upbringing; of fallen, uncertain or bastard origin; or of no fixed caste or situation' (*DFT*, p. 314). He typifies the urban nether realm in which Bolshevism and revolution were hatched and a post-war Europe in which traditional nationality and culture have been severely confused.¹⁵⁴ This narrative strand is measured against the Taverners, whose

¹⁵⁴ Butts's susceptibility to paranoid anti-Semitic discourse is manifested by her ebullient reading in 1930 of Nesta Webster's *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements* (London: Boswell, 1924). Webster, initially a novelist, secured some influence as a writer of pseudo-historical books and articles in which she traced the international Jewish Bolshevik conspiracy back to eighteenth-century Satanism and freemasonry. Butts's approving comments on Webster's work throw a sobering light on Butts's involvement with John Rodker and the anti-war socialists in 1916.

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lands are irrigated by 'streams of England', whose 'spring' is 'the life-source of a people' (*DFT*, p. 339).

The portrayal of Kralin as 'actually obscene' (*DFT*, p. 231) connotes that the Jewish body is a mark of tainted sexuality and rank perversion. Delineated by Scylla as a 'scientific pornographer' (*DFT*, p. 177), Kralin hangs 'shocking pictures' (*DFT*, p. 232) on his dead wife's wall, and sets about converting her 'treasure' (*DFT*, p. 230) – her estate – into a 'public lavatory' (*DFT*, p. 229). In a moment of macabre absurdity Kralin proposes to open a cinema showing first-run sex films on the Taverner property (*DFT*, p. 265). As a 'practising psychologist' (*DFT*, p. 292) whose 'interests were all cerebral' (*DFT*, p. 240), he has 'impeccable perverse taste' but has been 'psychoanalysed out of any pleasure in anything' (*DFT*, p. 178). He also plans to publish Felicity's private papers as 'an erotic classic' (*DFT*, p. 261), arguing that in 'these days of psychoanalysis, it might be very widely read' (*DFT*, p. 260) and should 'throw so many lights on the ultimate psychology of our behaviour' (*DFT*, p. 261).

Like Julia Taverner, Kralin's respect for psychoanalytical paradigms is evidence of his venality; both characters, for different reasons, resolve to destroy Felicity and act in collusion against her. Kralin's physiology is a bizarre composite of biomechanical impulses that blurs the conventional distinction between them. Although machines, as a creation of man, are 'ultimately a work of nature' (*DFT*, p. 302), Kralin blindly worships technology as end in itself (*DFT*, p. 302). Felicity had termed Kralin's nihilistic drive 'the Grey Thing' (*DFT*, p. 178), and Butts suggests it was her exposure to this substance that killed her. It is, in Scylla's opinion, 'pockets of poisoned air' which seem 'everywhere now' (*DFT*, p. 225). Butts's concept of 'the Grey Thing' is analogous to the energies opposed to 'Life Worship' in Masterman's *The Condition of England* (1911): '[Life Worship] rebels always against the mechanic pacing to and fro; the set *grey life*; the apathetic end' (my italics).¹⁵⁵ By invoking this noxious 'grey web' (*DFT*, p. 226) circulating through culture because of Kralin's machinations, Butts singles out the Jew as a pervasive source of infection, given his fierce antipathy towards the Taverner adoration of green and white – he is 'blind to colours' (*DFT*, p. 296); his eyes resemble 'two almonds of grey jelly' (*DFT*, p. 215).

The Taverners are aligned with *mana* and perform ablutions to cleanse the land of Jewish taint: '[a] rite that was like a bath, a purification, a becoming mana again [...] a taking-back, in a profound sense, into caste' (*DFT*, p. 229). Felicity's ghostly presence records racial memories, helping to save her estate and bloodline from contagion. Although Felicity is not judged as the

¹⁵⁵ Masterman, *The Condition of England*, p. 208.

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lawful heir to her own Taverner property, Butts fashions a distinction between the Nation as a 'natural' entity and the State as an insidious tool or invention of patriarchal culture, indicating that because women have a privileged relation to nature they are part of the hereditary immemorial rights of England – even though the State stubbornly refuses to accord them this function. While Felicity's beloved home 'in point of law' (*DFT*, p. 274) belongs to her brother Adrian, who had planned to trade it with his mother in exchange for the discharge of his fraudulent debts, the novel rejoices in and idealises the daughter's 'natural' inheritance rights against the decree that 'in any country the position of the favourite son' (*DFT*, p. 182) is primary. Her mystical and trans-historical claim on her estate debunks a traditional system of land-based political and sexual advantage. Though not legally binding, Felicity's rights are upheld as 'wholly moral' (*DFT*, p. 278) by those figures seeking justice for her outside the dispiriting laws that enforce a partial protocol of male proprietorship.¹⁵⁶

VIII

Butts's notion of Felicity as earth-goddess chimes with Harrison's stress on primitive animism and the experiential rather than rigid rationality. Harrison's claim is ratified ironically by Boris's eager intervention, though this gay Anglophile Russian exile is at odds with the Taverners' native standards. For Harrison, it is a 'matter of deep conviction' to repudiate the 'intellectual attempt to define the indefinable'.¹⁵⁷ Butts's *Journals* are characterised by their pronounced recognition of, and need to enshrine, the 'difficulty [...] of writing down these conceptions that constantly occur, yet always on the borderlands of the mind'.¹⁵⁸ 'It is the rule of great mystical [...] experience', she remarks, 'that it cannot be told directly'.¹⁵⁹ Picus in *Death of Felicity Taverner* similarly posits that the magical and irrational, by their very resistance to the clipped precision of expository discourse, contains a deeper truth:

[y]ou can get a first in Greats or fly around the crater of Vesuvius, but what you depend on for your private life is your degree in witch-doctoring. How much you can smell out the propitious from the unpropitious (*DFT*, p. 179).

¹⁵⁶ For a recent discussion of femininity and the body politics of Englishness in interwar regional fiction see Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt, *Narrative Settlements: Geographies of British Women's Fiction between the Wars* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 80-104.

¹⁵⁷ Harrison, *Alpha and Omega*, p. 205.

¹⁵⁸ Butts, *Journals*, 16 January 1937, p. 467.

¹⁵⁹ Butts, *Journals*, 11 August 1935, p. 449.

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Commentators have queried Butts's selection of a homosexual advocate for the Taverners against Kralin in a novel that suggests on occasions a proto-fascist pastoral obsessed with the concept of 'pure' citizenship. Yet Boris instinctively appreciates the family's atavistic aversion to the exploitation of their regional seat. Like the Taverners themselves, Boris is a man of impeccable 'breeding' (*DFT*, p. 198) who has been violently severed from his ancestral clan; and blames Kralin for this dispossession (*DFT*, p. 277).¹⁶⁰ Boris has access to alternative visionary geographical spaces – '*Born to see strange sights, Things invisible*' (*DFT*, p. 224) – and straddles two worlds (bustling metropolitan centre and lonely rustic hinterland, seen and unseen, Russia and England). Whereas the homosexual in *Armed with Madness* has to be eliminated because his presence compromises the novel's belief in the female's reproductive splendour, Boris quietly respects this 'healthy' imperative and does not allow his own 'deviant' sexual preferences to inhibit or derail the procreative process. This is signified by the reference to Scylla and Felix who, anxiously awaiting Boris's return from the fatal cave, feel as though 'they were unborn organisms inside an egg' (*DFT*, p. 360). Boris is a redemptive figure who will bring the Taverners to rebirth through his timely intervention, keen to step 'inside [their] magic ring' (*DFT*, p. 232) and effect a double 'katharsis' (*DFT*, p. 198): purging the 'green' world of Kralin's 'grey' monstrosity.

Like 'a god whose head faces two ways' (*DFT*, p. 275), Boris appears as a Janus-faced conflation of the historical and the mythical. Through this adroit intermediary, Butts stages the importance of Harrisonian ceremonial to a nonplussed modernity, stressing the necessity of incorporating purgative acts into rustic rhythms. Not merely a man but a facilitator of primitive ritual, Boris willingly 'play[s] a role' (*DFT*, p. 350) in the Taverners' tangled family 'drama'. His acute receptivity to the 'daimon' (*DFT*, p. 277) who speaks to him – arguably a spiritualised figure of Felicity, whom he regards as his 'guardian-angel' (*DFT*, p. 277) – can be read as an allusion to Harrison's hypothesis that underworld ghosts are feminine spirits remorselessly seeking revenge; Boris is propelled by female mythic potency: he is like 'a little baby born by [Scylla's] wild anger' (*DFT*, p. 351). Aligned against Kralin who rationalises religion and subjugates humanity to so-called higher, loftier intelligences, Boris's actions harmonise with Harrison's observation that religious belief is 'the outcome rather of emotion than of intellect'.¹⁶¹ While Kralin's fondness for psychoanalytical jargon typifies his moral and spiritual

¹⁶⁰ During his thirteen years of wandering around Europe as a refugee on a 'pilgrimage to nowhere' (*DFT*, p. 304), only Boris's 'pure blood' and 'scrupulous [...] upbringing had kept him alive' (*DFT*, p. 311). He is similar to his gay predecessor (also named Boris) in *Imaginary Letters*, who is also of aristocratic and hieratic descent.

¹⁶¹ Harrison. *Alpha and Omega*, p. 203.

bankruptcy, Boris disdains the agents and instruments of 'fashionable psychology' (*DFT*, p. 246), being a votary instead of '[g]lood mother-magic' (*DFT*, p. 309).

Coded as an effeminate male because of his homosexuality, Boris is a 'queer miracle' (*DFT*, p. 336), who concocts a plan to lure Kralin to a secluded tide-bound cave that he claims would be a perfect spot from which to generate a lucrative tourist industry. Kralin is predictably seduced by the prospect of speedy commercial gain; he contemplates the prospect of motorboat excursions from the cave and fantasises about a 'faked story of its history' (*DFT*, p. 356). Kralin's investment in radical dissimulation is measured against Felicity's clique as 'lovers of truth' (*DFT*, p. 257), who 'cannot endure imitations of anything' (*DFT*, p. 301). Nature-cum-Felicity swallows Kralin whole and buries him within her womb as 'island tomb' (*DFT*, p. 363) – the body of the earth-goddess is a source of necessary death as well as of buoyant replenishment.

Through Boris, Butts fictionalises Harrison's view that ritual is 'a representation' or 'a re-doing', but 'always with a practical end' – in this case, the re-instating of a daughter's *natural* inheritance rights.¹⁶² With the elimination of the Jew, Nature proclaims herself, but Felicity needs Boris to help her execute what amounts to an ethnic cleansing of her secluded corner of Dorset. By symbolically removing all impurities through a re-enactment of primitive ceremonial, initiated by awakening ancient communal instincts of self-preservation, Butts fuses the sacred and the profane. Following Harrison's discussion of the *pharmakoi* (human scapegoat) whose sacrifice will 'purify' the city, the rituals purge personal passion of emotion and function as a collective experience for the public good. Butts positions Boris as the modern savage: his ritualistic slaying of Kralin enables the Taverners' threadbare reputation, and more importantly their regional and genetic legacy, to endure if not to prosper. Felicity orchestrates the unfolding drama; her 'passion and detachment' (*DFT*, p. 169) amplified in Nature that, 'for all is utter detachment [...] had its eye on him' (*DFT*, p. 239). As Harrison points out: '[w]ith perception there is no conception'.¹⁶³

For both Butts and Harrison, the dynamics of ritual practice consist not in ratiocination but in the expression of direct perception, and human intervention. 'Nature's enormous, satiric eye' (*DFT*, p. 201) is an imperial gaze, possessively overseeing her dominion and attending to the spiritual welfare of her endangered species. Like Scylla in *Armed with Madness*, Felicity's body must endure a ritualistic martyrdom: '[i]t was as if it had been decided on that she was to be crucified' (*DFT*, p. 226). Drawing from both

¹⁶² Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 135.

¹⁶³ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 71.

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Christian and pagan traditions, Butts constructs Felicity as a thoroughly modern saviour who, although oppressed by those who aim to 'wound and torture and bleed her to death' (*DFT*, p. 171) maintains the vigour she derives from her sexuality, which can reverse 'the madness of decline, of unified decay'¹⁶⁴ to reprieve the environment. Boris's remark that Felicity's love was 'as good as any art to her' (*DFT*, p. 188) refines Harrison's observation that art and ritual are 'well-nigh indistinguishable' because both flow from a common human impulse: 'the intense, world-wide desire that the life of Nature which seemed dead should live again'.¹⁶⁵ Butts's revisionist treatment of the Persephone figure is meant to perpetuate human energy, 'the *mana* out of which great nations are born'.¹⁶⁶

For Butts the feminised Dorset topography conjures the image of a giant female eyeball: '[t]he earth has its eye open night and day, an infinite number of eyes. Utterly observant, utterly indifferent eyes' (*WH*, p. 20). Whatever echoes of Wordsworth's direct perception are implicit here it is not the observer, but external concrete nature who contemplates the unnatural: Kralin's corruption is related to his sneering disregard for the region's elemental role as pedagogical 'goddess' (*WH*, p. 30). Butts's Persephone displays a different mode of seeing that construes the modern moment as part of the interconnectedness of all history: 'we are spectators of a situation which is the mask for another situation [...] in a remote age [...] a world that is outside time' (*AR*, p. 44). This evokes Butts's own mystical conception of history, 'a kind of ambidextrous time sense; in certain states I will confuse my analysis of the present into immediate past & immediate future, & use them interchangeably'.¹⁶⁷

Butts's fictional formulation of Persephone in an imaginary Wessex underlines the '*strange sights, things invisible*' (*DFT*, p. 224) bequeathed to a landed elite in their defence of a bounded genealogical site. The novels portray woman's agency as crucial to this august project of rustic regeneration, signalling how she can intercede in, and profoundly rehabilitate the nation's historical and mythic narratives. Butts's female protagonists understand how 'the unavoidable realities of nature, birth and death and change of state, are of the same nature as the offices and dramas we call sacraments' (*WH*, p. 292). In *Imaginations*, Carlos Williams discusses

Giants in the dirt. The gods, the Greek gods, smothered in filth and ignorance. The race is scattered over the world. Where is its home? [...] It's all the gods, there's nothing else worth writing of. They are the same as they always were – but fallen. Do they

¹⁶⁴ Libbian Benedict, 'Decadence in England', *New York Sun* (26 May 1928), 34.

¹⁶⁵ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 26.

¹⁶⁶ Butts, *Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra*, p. 278.

¹⁶⁷ Butts, *Journals*, 11 October 1931, p. 372

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dance now, they that danced beside Helicon? They dance much as they did then, only
few have an eye for it through the dirt and fumes.¹⁶⁸

Butts forges a 'home' for her 'race' by sanctifying a daughter's ancestral access to English prehistory; this mystical votary possesses an 'eye' to appreciate the 'gods'. However, this patrician heroine reveals that Butts is unable finally to shape a project of meaningful connection that might fuse differences without removing them. So fearfully she reverts to a conservative discourse of 'natural' plenitude founded upon a punitive, even anti-Semitic, credo of Anglo-Saxon power, patronage, and privilege.

¹⁶⁸ William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations*, ed. by Webster Schott (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970), p. 60.

Afterword

Mary Butts, in a 1933 essay on the use of the supernatural in English fiction, commended John Buchan's imaginative exploration of the Persephone myth in his imperial romance *The Dancing Floor* (1926).

It is noticeable that men with a *flair* for life as it is lived – war and adventure and social relations – have often their mystical preoccupations as well. The more thoroughgoing the worldly activities, the public life, the deeper the preoccupation would seem [...] [John] Buchan can be called Rider Haggard's successor [...] A scholar, antique civilisation haunts his work [...] as in a recent novel, *The Dancing Floor* [...] which] is one of the first novels to owe its origin to *The Golden Bough*. There, in an obscure Greek island, owned by a girl the peasants hate on account of her father's sham obscene sorceries, the ritual of the Kouros and Kore is evoked by them against her. [...] Buchan knows the first law – for whatever it may mean, the law is there – of the interaction of other worlds with ours.¹

Like many authors included in this study, Butts saw herself as the beneficiary of a period of unprecedented 'excavation' into the nature of ancient civilisations. In *Traps for Unbelievers*, she registers to what degree her own 'mystical preoccupation' with unearthing originary moments of female empowerment (so as to actualise contemporary cultural change) was fuelled by 'the rise of anthropology and the science of comparative religions.' Describing the historical factors that transmuted the primitive from an irretrievable, degraded stage in the chronicle of human progress into a seminal site of modernist cultural enquiry she remarks: 'we have learned how to take fresh stock, compare Zeus with Jehovah, Aphrodite with Ashtaroht, and the pair of them with the Virgin [...] It was a re-examination of extraordinary possibilities and value' (*TFU*, p. 320).

By 1914, at the zenith of European imperialism, when 86 percent of the globe was under direct or indirect European control, ethnological museums could be located in every principal city, and a whole generation of Victorian anthropologists, including E. B. Tylor, Andrew Lang, Edward Westermarck, James Frazer and Jane Harrison had published literally thousands of pages delineating the art, myth, and culture of non-Western indigenous peoples. Butts applauds the fervour with which British writers embraced Persephone and other Hellenic myths as a mode of authorising myriad political, social, and cultural enterprises. Yet her pamphlet is tinged by a galling sense that this anthropological verve has now dwindled into sensual escapism, or even worse the touristic and vapid dilettantism that Hardy decries in Angel Clare

¹ Butts, 'Ghosties and Ghoulies', p. 345.

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from *Tess*: ‘classical education’ as the mere ‘mark of a gentleman’, but also ‘a desire to be primitive at all costs, to scour the cults and ceremonies for traces of totem-worship and fetish, for cannibalism and human sacrifice, for orgies and black magic [...] and all the “gay science” of the anthropologist’ (*TFU*, p. 320). Her prognosis is glum:

So it would seem that the Gods, who for two thousand years have survived the organised forces of Christianity, are about to descend into a final twilight with their conqueror. As we have seen, they have not, like Christianity, become tabu, merely more and more symbolic, and what is more at the moment, artistically suspect, the good with the bad, the Parthenon marbles along with the copy, at five removes, of a detestable late Venus from a gentleman’s private house. (*TFU*, p. 321)

However, Demeter and Persephone, far from being relinquished or consigned to a ‘final twilight’ (*TFU*, p. 321) have continued to energise countless writers since the death of Mary Butts in 1937. It is fair to say that it would require another lengthy monograph to survey the dizzying multitude of literary adaptations that proliferate up to the present day.²

What is especially striking about Butts’s attitude in *Traps for Unbelievers* is how its melancholy ‘twilight’ tone returns us to the tormented treatment of Demeter-Persephone in Hardy’s *Tess* and Webb’s *Gone to Earth*: both authors signify that the myth cannot unite the disparate elements of their personal and artistic lives because an authentic connection with what these deities personify for art, ritual, and mystical experience has been irrevocably lost. With jaded ennui Butts implies that when we contemplate the religion attached to these female archetypes there will pass ‘across our minds the images of a series of statues, or, in most cases, copies of copies of statues,

² Notable re-imaginings of the Persephone myth to dramatise narratives of descent and rebirth include Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing*, Doris Lessing, *Summer before the Dark* and *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*. Other literary examples not covered here include Frederic Manning’s ‘Kore’ (1910) which partially inspired Ezra Pound’s interest in Persephone; John Drinkwater, ‘Persephone’ (1926); William Rose Benet, ‘Sung to Persephone’ (1933); John Peale Bishop, ‘The Coming of Persephone’ (1948); Kathleen Raine, ‘Transit of the Gods’ (1956); Edna St. Vincent Millay, ‘Prayer to Persephone’ (1956); Ronald Bottrall ‘Proserpine at Enna’ (1961); Margaret Atwood, *Double Persephone* (1961); Carolyn Kizer, ‘Persephone Pauses’ (1961); Nathaniel Tarn, ‘Persephone’s Down’ (1964); Philip Martin ‘Myths’ (1970); Nancy Willard, ‘The Animals Welcome Persephone’ (1974); Olga Broumas, ‘Demeter’ (1977); Mary Winfrey, ‘Demeter’s Song’ (1978); Robert Kelly, *The Book of Persephone* (1978); Stanley Kunitz, ‘For Persephone’ (1979); Kate Ellis, ‘Matrilineal Descent’ (1980); Mildred J. Nash, ‘Demeter’s Daughters’ (1981); Edward Sanders, ‘Demeter walking th’ corn furrow’ (1982); A. D. Hope, ‘Persephone’ (1986); Michèle Roberts, *The Mirror of the Mother* (1986); Joan Aleshire, ‘Persephone’ (1987); Helen Lawson, ‘Persephone’ (1988); Natasha Yim, ‘The Abduction of Persephone’ (1988); Carol Rumens, ‘Persephone in America’ (1988); Keith Abbott, ‘Persephone’ (1989); Rita Dove, ‘Persephone Abducted’ (1992); Enid Dame, ‘Persephone’ (1992). Robert Graves’s ‘Escape’ (1927) and Robert Duncan’s ‘Persephone’ (1966) refer to the goddess in poems about war.

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with a *risqué* story attached to each' (TFU, p. 320). An account of the statue of Cnidian Demeter opens the chapter on Forster, whose bid to transcend irreverent appreciation of a grimy museum piece is documented in *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*. This project, however well intentioned, cannot succeed and the only option left for Forster is to transfer attention to a continent largely untouched by the Western classical tradition in *A Passage to India*.

D. H. Lawrence, with spirited insouciance, refuses to countenance this note of defeatism in the work of his admired predecessors. In *The Lost Girl* Alvina Houghton craves a richer, more shattering and revelatory experience that can only be apprehended in the 'underworld' of exile to her Italian husband's mountain village. As in Edith Wharton's little-noticed but trenchant playlet, entitled 'Pomegranate Seed' (1912), which presents the Demeter-Persephone myth in concentrated form, forbidden subterranean knowledge is not just half-seductive, it is essential for future spiritual and aesthetic growth. Wharton's interest in the myth as a repository of 'dark' secrets invites comparison with Lawrence. Wharton's unpublished autobiographical fragment, 'Life and I', probably written in the early 1920s, is telling:

[Words] sang to me so bewitchingly that they almost lured me from the wholesome noonday air of childhood into some strange supernatural region where the normal pleasures of my age seemed as insipid as the fruits of the Earth to Persephone after she had eaten of the pomegranate seed.³

In this eloquent fragment, Wharton contrasts her childhood enthrallment with words to Persephone's consumption of the pomegranate seed. For Wharton this eating of forbidden fruit (symbolically, of chthonic perceptions) is an irreversible, transformative act as it proves for Lawrence's Alvina when she arrives in southern Italy, thus sealing her fate and certifying the extent of her 'fall' from the parochial Midlands precepts of her parents' generation. Alvina is permanently 'marked' by her surrender to the ambience of her taciturn husband's inhospitable locale.

That a detailed discussion of Mary Butts should close this study seems fitting given that she is arguably the most devoted to modifying the myth as a means of enunciating a renovated and truculent model of English femininity. Hardy and Webb utilise Demeter-Persephone to aggravate the feeling of provincial inevitability; Forster and Lawrence transport their characters to Italy in order to probe the elliptical dynamics of the myth. However, through

³ Edith Wharton, 'Life and I', quoted in Josephine Donovan, *After the Fall: The Demeter-Persephone Myth in Wharton, Cather, and Glasgow* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), p. 43.

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all her non-historical fictions Mary Butts is haunted by the concept of an Anglo-Saxon fertility goddess, whose transfiguring capacities combine Hellenic merits with animistic undercurrents drawn from the soil of southwest England. That Butts should remain herself a Persephone figure, for too long drifting in a critical limbo and rarely showcased on university reading lists in literary modernism, is a disappointing trend this book hopes to correct.

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